

The Coming of Christ

In our last article we showed that the whole New Testament age is the *last* time, according to Scripture. The last day or last time—the end—is not only something future but something present, something with which each of us must reckon, no matter when we live.

The coming of Christ must be similarly understood. As the great event of history through which all things are brought to their appointed end, the coming of Christ is not only something future, but also something present.

The point is, first, that the Christ's coming is described in Scripture as *one event* including his birth in Bethlehem, his return for judgment and all that happens in between. This is the reason why the prophets in the Old Testament seem to mix events that to us are separated by thousands of years of history. They saw it all as one event, and they were not wrong.

Both from the viewpoint of God's purpose and from the viewpoint of eternity itself (II Pet. 3:8), Christ's coming is one event which finishes history, accomplishes God's sovereign purpose, and ushers in the eternal and heavenly kingdom of God. The Old Testament prophets under the inspiration of the Spirit saw something of this.

This means, in the second place, that Christ is already coming! That is the way Scripture speaks. Though it also speaks of his coming as a future event, looking ahead to his personal and bodily return, it more often speaks in the present tense—that he is coming and that throughout all history. He is on the way, and his personal appearance at the very end is only the final stage of something that began in Bethlehem (Matt. 26:64—note the word “hereafter,” i.e., “from now on”; Matt. 28:20).

Scripture, therefore, not only speaks of Christ's birth as his “coming” (and remember, the Old Testament prophets do not clearly distinguish it from other aspects of his coming), but also speak of various other events as part of the “coming” of Christ. These are especially three:

(1) He comes through the Spirit (Jn. 14:16-18). Because the outpouring of the Spirit is part of the coming of Christ, even the Apostle Peter in his Pentecost sermon does not make a clear distinction between that event and those things that we connect with the very end of the world, blood and fire, smoke and darkness (Acts 2:16-21).

(2) He also comes for believers at death. *He* comes! though not personally and bodily. He himself assures us of this in John 14:2, 3. That, of course, is our comfort.

(3) He also comes through the preaching of the gospel. That Christ himself speaks through the gospel is evident (Jn. 10:27; Eph. 2:17). Through it also, therefore, he comes and is present. This is the point in Matthew 28:19, 20. It is *in* preaching the gospel that Christ is present with us, even to the end.

All this means that the coming of Christ is not just a future event which has no immediate bearing on us, but something present with which we must always reckon. Indeed, in one or another of these senses, Christ comes every day and will certainly come in our own lifetimes when he comes to take us to himself!