

CONCERNING THE PROMISED RETURN OF THE LORD JESUS. By W. F. P. Burton.

Preface. In 1968 I received a letter from Mr Burton, stating that he had read my "excellent book" (his words, not mine) on Christ's Second Coming, and wanted to meet the author, and as a result he spent a week in our home in September of 1968, and what a joy and blessing that was. During this visit Mr Burton asked me to print and distribute this study. He stated that we were coming into the days when the prophecies concerning our Lord's return were about to be fulfilled, and so it was essential for us to know the Scriptures on this subject. Let us diligently contemplate, meditate upon, and study the words of this great Christian and apostle, and pay heed to his words of warning. W. H. Turner. March 24th. 2005.

Mr Burton writes. I cannot even remember the time when I was ignorant of the promise of the Lord Jesus to return again and take the saints to Himself. As soon as I learned to spell, I could decipher on our sitting room wall the text, "Surely I come quickly," Rev.22v20., and underneath, in red letters, "Perhaps today."

I was saved at nineteen years of age, and very literally, for over sixty years, my whole life has been, and still is, one great yearning longing for His return. Such passages as, "To those who look for Him shall He appear..." Heb.9v28. "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." Matt.24v44. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Titus.2v13. Such passages, I say, and many others of a similar nature, were construed as meaning that I must be in a constant attitude of expectancy. Hundreds and thousands of times, by day and by night, I have looked up and thought that those fleecy coverings of the sky might burst asunder and reveal my beloved Lord, the Bridegroom of the Church, coming for His bride.

Of course, I know all about the sceptic's jibe, that "up" in Great Britain would be "down" in New Zealand. I know, too, that there are billions of clouds over the earth. Nevertheless, "Behold He cometh with clouds and every eye shall see Him." Rev.1v7. At least ten times in Scripture His return is associated with clouds. Since He has promised to take the dead in Christ and the living in Christ, I shall be caught up, for I am in Christ. 1Thes.4v16,17. "We shall all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye." 1Cor15v51,52.

Some have imagined a secret coming, when the unsaved will suddenly find their Christian associates and relatives missing. They have imagined, for example, the Christian engine driver caught up and his train hurtling on driver-less to destruction. I could not agree to that, since the shout and the trumpet blast must be heard by all alike. 1Thes.4v10. It will be with blazing splendour, like the lightning, or day-dawn. Matt.24v27. 16v27. True, His coming is likened seven times to that of a thief, but that must be in its unexpectancy; hardly in its secrecy. It will not be silently, but with a mighty shout. "Every eye shall see Him." Rev.1v7.

I have given years of intensive study to dispensational truth. Some Christians dismiss prophetic teaching as something incomprehensible, or at least as a hobby for a few visionary cranks. Early in my Christian experience, however, I saw that the young Thessalonian believers were not ignorant of the times and seasons, so I must be ignorant either. 1Thes.5v1,2. For example, concerning "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet," the Lord Jesus said, Matt.24v15., "Whoso readeth let him understand." I determined to understand and have frequently given whole days to ferreting out these precious truths, reading through the whole Bible repeatedly in over twenty different versions, in four different languages, marking and tabulating with concordances and lexicons at my elbow, lest I should miss some truth. Of late I have devoted from twelve midnight till two or three in the morning to Bible study, when the world is quiet and there are no interruptions.

In my early Christian experience, I was taught to believe that first Christ would come FOR His saints, into the clouds, and that after an indeterminate period, covering at least part of that unparalleled tribulation which is to precede Christ's return, He would descend WITH His saints to earth.

It is evident that the last days of this dispensation are to be the darkest. "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith." 1Tim.4v1-3. "In the last days perilous times shall come..." 2Tim.3v1-5. "That day shall not come except there come a falling away first." 2Thes.2v1-4. "In the latter time of their kingdom, when transgressors are come to the full..." Dan.8v23-25. "At that time there shall be a time of trouble such as never was..." Dan.12v1,2. "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be." Matt.24v21. "At midnight... Behold the bridegroom cometh." Matt.25v6.

As I have ministered God's Word in assemblies large and small, white and black, for over sixty years, I have desired to be most careful that I was in line with the Truth. I have consulted the standard works on dispensational truth by Seiss, Trotter, Savage, Anderson, Pember, S. D. Gordon, Tregelles, McConkey, Samuel Wilkerson, David Baron, and many others less well known. These books I have not only read, but also studied deeply, making marginal notes, etc. In order to facilitate my study, I have devised a series of

marks in one of my Bibles: a yellow arrow UP indicates verses dealing with Christ's coming in the clouds and our rapture to Him, and a yellow arrow DOWN beside verses which speak of His return to earth with His saints. Here, however, I found myself in some quandary, for certain passages obviously refer to both. For instance:

(1) When Christ rose from the Mount of Olives and disappeared in the clouds, the two messengers in white declared that, "He shall come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven. Acts.1v11. with Luke.24v50,51. Bethany is on the Eastern slope of the Mount of Olives and when the Lord returns to deliver Jerusalem "His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives.... and all the saints with Thee." Zech.14v4,5. That obviously calls for a yellow arrow DOWN, yet the spectators of His ascension were believers, and if He is to return for believers, that should be indicated by a yellow arrow UP. The messengers in white spoke of no intermediate coming for His saints, nor of a subsequent coming to the earth. It was just ONE coming for His saints to the Mount of Olives.

(2) I have used Acts.15v14-18. as a clear passage, showing God's programme in the administration of His authority in this world. The passage shows four definite steps: first Israel; then the Gentiles; after that Israel again; and, finally, a universal worldwide sway. "I will build again the tabernacle of David," points back to God's dealings in the past and forward to His taking up Israel again. In between is the Gentile dispensation, the Church, in which we find ourselves today. God is taking out of the Gentiles a people for His Name. The next step is to be ushered in by the return of the Lord, for He says, "I will return and rebuild...." How can one point the arrow in that case? UP for the consummation of the Gentile age, yet DOWN for the time when Christ will return to reign as Israel's king. It is just one coming.

(3) A similar passage is in 2Thes.1v7,8. Our rest will be when Christ comes for us, but Paul places it "WHEN the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance....." That is certainly at His coming to earth. Was Paul right in placing the saints rest at the time when Christ comes to earth? Of course the God-inspired epistle to the Thessalonians is without fault, even though it may not fit in with our theories. But this passage continues further in the same strain, for in 2Thes.1v9 and 10, Paul speaks of the punishment of the wicked with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power, "WHEN He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe....in that day." **In other words His coming to punish the wicked and to be glorified in the saints IS THE SAME COMING.**

(4) That brilliant and devout scholar S.P. Tregelles draws our attention to 1Cor.15v51-54., where the resurrection and translation of the saints is associated with a particular passage in Isaiah, "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Is.27v7 and 8 shows it to be the time when the Lord shall reign in Mount Zion, **so there cannot be any lapse of time between His coming for the saints and His coming to reign. Rev.11v15-18. 22v12.**

For many years, though teaching in all its fullness the second coming of the Lord, I have hesitated to speak of the TIME of His coming. I have answered questions as to when He will come by Luke.21v27-31., the nations moving toward their final condition, as indicated in Daniel and Revelation, "when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." Or I have shown enquirers Mark.13v13v32., "Of that day and hour knoweth no man."

In order to support the teaching of two distinct comings, it is necessary to add "Of course, that is not His coming for His saints but His coming with them." But was it? These were the same disciples who were the foundation members of His Church and in Mark.13v37. Christ says, "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

Again, "For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Matt.24v22. One had to add, "Of course, this does not refer to the Church, for she will have been taken up to heaven before that. This must refer to the tribulation saints." **But Jesus did not say that. He simply said, "The elect," and we are all part of that elect.**

In dealing with Matt.24v14., "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations: and then shall the end come;" it was added (by those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church), "Of course, that is quite different from the gospel of God's grace." But is it? Jesus said, "**THIS GOSPEL.**" Paul said, "Though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let Him be accursed." Gal.1v8. Right up to the last sight we have of Paul, in the last verse of "The Acts of the Apostles," He was still expounding and testifying the kingdom of God. The Gospel of the kingdom is just the same sweet old Gospel by which we are saved and Jesus is our king too, "The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of Lords." 1Tim.6v15.

To return to my own experience, I had to make a solid determination that at all costs, I would read no more into the Scriptures than was written. To add or detract would bring very serious

results. Rev.22v18 and 19. Let me be sincere at all costs. His coming should be His coming: just that and no more. The elect should be the elect, and not this or that elect unless Jesus said so.

Considerable light came to me in looking up in Moulton and Milligan's Greek Lexicon the word "apantesin," "to meet," used in 1Thes.4v17., "caught up to meet the Lord in the air." **It is an exact word implying an official welcome to a newly arrived dignitary. It is used in Acts.28v15., where "the brethren came to meet us." The Christians went out of Rome to meet Paul and to conduct Him into their city. Just so we shall be caught up to give the Lord Jesus an official welcome and to return with Him to the Mount of Olives.**

In Rev.20v4 and 5., those who refuse the worship and mark of the Beast, the man of sin, are included in the first resurrection, so they cannot partake in that resurrection before the man of sin has appeared. **Moreover, since it is the FIRST resurrection, there can have been no other before it. The usual explanation given is that the rapture is "the first part of the first resurrection." Is not that a quibble? Surely it is adding to the Word of God, and making it of none effect. Note that in 2Thes.2v8., the man of sin, the Anti-Christ, is to be destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming ("epiphaneia tees parousias autou"), so that Christ's coming cannot occur before "that Wicked" has run his three year course. Rev.13v5.**

Another passage which teaches that there will be one coming and not two is Matthew.13v24-30,37-43. v38. "The good seed are the children of the kingdom." The bad seed "are the children of the Wicked One." v30. "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.".... v41. "The Son of man shall send forth His angels and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend."... v43. "Then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of their Father." **Note particularly, "both grow together until the harvest," and the tares are dealt with FIRST.**

The second chapter of Second Thessalonians was for some time a puzzle to me. However, I note that nearly all the translations put for "huper," "as touching, concerning," and the whole passage becomes plain. **"CONCERNING THE COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND OUR GATHERING TOGETHER UNTO HIM....THAT DAY SHALL NOT COME, EXCEPT THERE COME A FALLING AWAY FIRST, AND THE MAN OF SIN BE REVEALED." The rapture of the saints cannot occur before the great apostasy and the revelation of the Man of Sin: the beast whose picture is seen in Rev.13. and 2Thes.2v1-10.**

The Lord Jesus said that He would go away and come again. He told them that they should not see Him till they could say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." Mt.23v39. No sort of discrimination: just that He would return. So the disciples asked, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?" Matt.24v3. In reply He told them of the intervening tribulation and of the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Then in Matt.24v29,30. He continued, **"IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATION OF THOSE DAYS** shall the sun be darkened....and **THEN** shall appear the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven: and **THEN** shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." **When shall He come? "IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATION OF THOSE DAYS." It is THEN that the seventh and last trumpet will sound. 1Cor.15v52. Rev.11v15-19. Matt.24v31. 1Thes.4v16.; when He will pour wrath upon the godless and give rewards to the saints. Rev.22v12.**

One of the surest ways of exposing an error is to note the weakness of the arguments advanced in its favour. The two texts so often used to prove the pre-tribulation rapture are Dan.12v1. and 1Thes.5v9.. In Daniel 12v1., after speaking of a time of unparalleled tribulation, Daniel says, "At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." Now thank God we are among His people, and we are written in the book, so at that time we shall be delivered, but note that it does not say before the tribulation, or in the tribulation, or after the tribulation. Thus it is no proof either the one way or the other.

Of 1Thes.5v9., "God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." We all know that for us the wrath is passed and that when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, it is to take vengeance on those who know not God and who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2Thes.1v8. Thus we have no fear as to that day of wrath, but **the passage says nothing about being delivered from tribulation.** How about the millions that have been put to awful deaths in China, Russia, Congo and Korea, for no other sin than that they were Christians. Thus neither text can be taken to prove that the saints will not go through the tribulation, and the weakness of the pre-tribulation teaching is evidenced in its having to quote such texts to support it.

The question arises: How can intervening events, before the return of the Lord, affect our looking for Him, waiting for Him, being ready for His coming? How can we live in eager anticipation if we know that the awful tribulation must come first? It is moving to notice in the last few chapters of John, Christ's eager looking forward to His return to the Father. There are fourteen mentions of His going away, going to the Father, etc.

Even though the Lord Jesus knew that Calvary lay between, yet it did not dim His hope of seeing His Father again. Indeed, it was the joy that was set before Him which sustained Him in those awful hours of enduring the cross and shame. Heb.12v2.

A woman, as she draws near to the time when she will take her newborn babe in her arms, naturally dreads the ordeal of the birth pangs, but that does not hinder her eagerness to welcome her little one. Similarly, though every one of us would prefer to think that we would escape the coming tribulation, yet in spite of it, we look forward to the glories that lie beyond. **Indeed, it is that blessed hope of His coming, which will sustain the saints in their hour of greatest trial.**

This is not a question of what we would like, but of what the Bible teaches. One naturally inclines to the attractive idea that the Church will escape the great tribulation, but by all means let us be loyal to THE WORD OF GOD. There is no Scripture to say that the Holy Spirit, or the Church is to be removed before the Great tribulation. The restrainer of 2Thes.2v7. is recognised government. 1Tim.1v9,10. 1Pet.2v13,14. Rom.13v1-7. At the end there will be, indeed, there already is, a breakdown of lawful control. 2Tim.3v1-5.

If the Spirit and the Church are to be removed from the earth dominated by Satan, how can the world have its greatest revival, with converts that no man can number? Rev.7v14. The saints will continue to be massacred till the end, Rev.6v11., but they are promised preservation through and out of tribulation. Ps.121v6. Isa.26v20. Jer.39v17,18. Zeph.2v3. Dan.12v1. Luke.21v36. John.17v15. 2Pet.2v9. Rev.3v10. (Exod.9v6,8,26. 10v23.)

It is amazing to note how persistently false teachers echo the error that the Church will be removed, and the Holy Spirit taken away, before that last great tribulation. One would almost think that by their constant reiteration they could make wrong right, and all because of 2Thes.2v7. where the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned. They tell us that Matthew 24. is "Jewish," yet it is spoken to some of the same disciples as John chapters 14 to 16. Are they also "Jewish?" These were the foundation members of the Christian Church.

Was ever so important a doctrine as the return of the Lord Jesus mishandled so sadly, without any solid foundation whatever. They virtually declare, "I have made up my mind, so please don't confuse me with facts." Brethren, may I plead for a sane return to the Word of God, and let us not read into it more than is written there.

WHEN WILL CHRIST COME? IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TRIBULATION. Matt.24v29,30.

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