

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

By F. M. Perry, 11/19/99

You will remember that the body of Jesus was put to death on a cruel cross and then His body was laid in a tomb. But His body was raised from that tomb by the power of God, and Jesus then walked on the earth as a fleshly man again for a period of forty days. At the close of this forty day period Jesus met with His closest disciples on the Mount of Olives just outside the city of Jerusalem. Jesus gave the disciples His final face to face instructions at that time. Then He was taken up to heaven to be no more with His disciples in bodily form until His next coming (or second coming). The Bible says about this coming occasion:

"He (Jesus) was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into Heaven.'" (Acts 1:9-11).

While Jesus had lived in the flesh on earth with His disciples He had explained to them that He would have to die, be buried in a tomb, be raised again, and then go away from the material earth back to heaven for awhile, and finally, some day, come back to redeem His people and to judge the people of the earth. This final return of Jesus some day is referred to as the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus had said to His disciples before He left:

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3).

Ever since His ascension into heaven in the first century, people have been expecting and looking for His second coming. But Jesus put no specific date on His second coming. In fact, He said that it was not for Him to know when His second coming would occur for God the Father would determine that. In other words, Jesus did not know the time of His own second coming. Only God the Father knows, said Jesus. The Bible says:

"But of the day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." (Mark 13:32).

Although Jesus made it clear that He would come back in a "second coming," and although He also made it clear that no human being knows when the second coming will occur, human beings still seek to know the unknowable. People have sought to put an exact date on the second coming of Jesus ever since the first century when Jesus first announced His departure and second coming. The disciples of Jesus asked Him directly, "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" Jesus replied:

"See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars: see that you are not frightened, for these things must take place, but this is not the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come." (Matthew 24:4-14).

Jesus spoke about the state of the world before He comes again, but He did not say when His coming would occur. He said there would be false prophets trying to mislead everyone about His second coming. He said there would be wars in the world and there would be natural disasters like famines and earthquakes. But these disasters would not be the end. He said that His followers would be subjected to tribulation, would be hated, and even would be killed by people of the world. He said that some of His followers would even turn against others of His followers because their love would grow cold. But in it all, He promised He would come again and save all His followers who endured to the end. And He said that all through the upheavals of the world, the gospel would never cease to be preached to all nations. Then and only then, after all that, He said that He would come again to save His followers and bring the world to an end. But He did not say exactly when the time of the end would be. He had already said that He did not know, that only God the Father knows when He is to come again.

Despite all this, many people are confused and think they ought to know the exact date when Jesus will come again. So they speculate and try to reason out an exact date when Jesus will come again. This was true even in the first century church of Christ. The Christians in the first century city of Thessalonika were confused. They had seized on the idea that Jesus would come again during their lifetime, that is, before they died fleshly deaths. They would have had Jesus come again in the first century. But as the years went by some of them died and they did not see the Lord come again. And others were growing old and they began to fear that they would not be alive when Jesus came again. Some speculated that perhaps Jesus had already come and they had missed the occasion. It became such a grievous subject that the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote them a letter to clear up their confusion. He wrote:

"But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who have fallen asleep (or, have died), that you do not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep (died) in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word

of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1st Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Paul has informed us in this letter that it does not matter whether or not a Christian is alive at the time of the second coming, he will be resurrected and taken up to heaven to dwell with Jesus. Those who might happen to be alive at that time will in no way have advantage over those who have died in Jesus. Note that no specific generation of people is scheduled to be alive at the time of Jesus' second coming. Jesus does not know the time. The date and hour of His coming is truly known only to God the Father.

But human speculation concerning a specific date for the Lord's return has continued to this very day despite the fact that the Lord has warned us about the error of such speculation. We live today very near the end of the second millennium since our Lord first came to the earth. And there is much speculation that somehow God has chosen this time to have Jesus come again to claim His people and to judge the world. But there is no support for that speculation in God's word to us, the Bible.

LENGTH OF ONE'S LIFE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LENGTH OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

God has revealed all that we need to know about the second coming of Christ in the Bible. The Bible tells us that the conduct of one's life while one lives in the flesh, on the earth, before Christ's second coming, is the more important subject to contemplate. God is concerned about the eternal welfare of His created human beings. The period of concern for any individual is not measured in thousand year periods but in individual life spans while alive on earth. God is concerned about my life and your life while we live our short lives on earth, while we have

free wills to choose. After Jesus comes again we will no longer have freedom to choose to live with Jesus unless we have made that choice before He comes. While one lives in the flesh one can choose to be subject to the reign of God through Jesus Christ, or one can choose to be subject to the reign of Satan, the devil, who is called the Prince of this World. One's choices made now while one is alive on earth are the most important choices of one's life in eternity because they determine where one will stand at the time of Jesus' second coming and the judgement. No matter in what millennium one lives, each and every person has been given only one short life span in which to prepare for the second coming of Jesus. The Bible expresses this truth as follows:

"It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgement." (Hebrews 9:27).

BIBLICAL VIEW OF REALITY INCLUDES BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL REALMS.

The Bible speaks to us in terms of a world view that is different from the world view of many human beings today. Many human beings view themselves simply as residents of this material planet earth where, they think, all life begins and ends. They try to explain everything in terms of what their fleshly senses convey to them. Their senses come only in contact with physical materials. They say a thing does not exist if they cannot detect it with the senses of the fleshly body. Holding strictly to that view, they do not accept the existence of the Almighty God. For God is invisible to the senses of the body, since God dwells in a spiritual (or metaphysical) realm.

The Bible instructs us that the true reality in which we live encompasses two realms: (1) The physical realm of the material universe in which our fleshly bodies live. (2) The spiritual (or metaphysical) realm in which our souls and spirits live. These two realms, the material and the spiritual, are completely related and exist together, for everything in the physical realm was created by God who is Spirit. Together the two realms are really one realm. Human beings have been created by God with bodies in the physical realm and souls and spirits in the spiritual

realm. Human minds have difficulty comprehending the invisible, spiritual part of our realm.

The Bible helps us expand our limited world view to include the realities of the spiritual realm in our daily lives. For instance, the Bible makes it clear that human beings are held responsible for knowing something about God even though God is invisible to the fleshly senses.

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:20).

This scripture makes it clear that human beings are held responsible for knowing about something they cannot see with their five fleshly senses, namely, the attributes, the power, and the divine nature of God. How can God expect human beings, with limited sensory perception, to be accountable to Him whom they cannot see? The answer is that God created humans with the ability to arrive at some spiritual truth through powers of deduction. The existence of the Almighty God is deduced through observation of what God has created.

Thus God has spoken to us through what He has created that we can see with our fleshly senses. And concerning details of the unseen spiritual realm which are not readily apparent, God has given us His Son to explain Him, and has spoken to us through His word, the Bible. He tells us that we must conform our view of overall reality to the fact that the world of the physical realm is finite, while the unseen, invisible, spiritual realm is infinite. The Apostle Paul expressed this thought as follows:

"While we look not at the things which are seen. but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2nd Corinthians 4: 18) .

The "things which are seen" comprise the things which can be sensed

with the five fleshly senses. They make up the physical realm. The things which are not seen are the things which exist but which are invisible to the five human senses. They make up the spiritual realm. The physical realm is temporal, that is, not permanent, but finite. The unseen spiritual realm is permanent and infinite. We must embrace the spiritual realm into our conscious minds in order to learn about our Great Spiritual God and the spiritual realm in which we will live for eternity.

The Apostle John spoke of the second coming of Jesus with these words:

"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." (1st John 3:2).

This scripture refers to the second coming of Jesus when the "children of God" are resurrected to meet Jesus in the air. Then "the children of God" will leave the physical realm of fleshly bodies and be transformed into the spiritual realm so they can see Jesus as He actually is. They will be transformed so that spirits are no longer invisible to them. And they will be wholly and completely inhabitants of the spiritual realm where God is. (Read 1st Corinthians, chapter 15).

God provides all things of a factual nature. The physical and spiritual realms exist. Human beings make their own choices concerning their acceptance of God's truths of the Bible. Everything has been provided for the advantage of the children of God. It is up to each of us to make his choice to become a child of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

"To Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen."
(Revelation 1:6).