

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

0. INTRODUCTION

Eschatology, the teaching on the end of the world, the second coming of Christ, and the expected judgment of God, is a subject that has been of primary interest to Christians since time immemorial. How many times has a date been set, how many times has it been announced! How many forms have these expectations taken, and how many disappointments have been brought about by unfulfilled hopes of the Lord's coming! There have been so many that most of the "old" churches have ceased to be interested in the subject. There have even been opinions that this Gospel message was to be understood symbolically, that is, that Christ would return, or had already returned, to the hearts of Christians, and would restore or renew a kind of mystical "kingdom of God" in their hearts. Only a rigorous biblical analysis can provide a definitive answer and resolution to this particularly delicate and multifaceted problem. This shows that the symbolic concept of Christ's return is highly speculative and cannot be adequately supported by biblical arguments, not to mention existing precedents. Let us look instead to the Gospel accounts.

1. SIGNS OF THE TIME OF THE END

Mt 24:1-3	<i>"Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 'Do you see all these things?' he asked. 'Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" [NIV]</i>
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Note: The term "parousia" used here has the original and basic meaning of presence. Because of theological incomprehensibility,¹ preference has traditionally been given to the later figurative meaning of arrival. But since this presence will take place in the context of His coming (as a historical milestone), we will continue to use the traditional term arrival for simplicity. This will not change the meaning of the interpretation.

What follows is Jesus' long list of predicted events. Since biblical prophecies are actually descriptions of social laws, they have multiple fulfilments. The disciples did not know at the time that the return of the Son of Man would take place at the end of the 2nd covenant and not the 1st because Jesus did not and could not tell them (Joh 16:12). The disciples thought that the end of the Jewish age and the coming of the Son of Man in the power of the kingdom of God (such a Messiah was expected by all of Judaism) would be revealed even within their covenant, that is, at the end of that age (Ac 1:6). Therefore, they asked both these things at once. In their imagination they could not yet separate them from each other.

The reign of the Messiah is therefore to come at the end of the 2nd covenant, but there is a striking parallel between the events of the ends of the two covenants. Jesus, therefore, answered both questions at once. He answered as he was accustomed to do from his study of Bible prophecy, expressing the major characteristic features and patterns of events applicable to both cycles. Thus, the course of the conclusion of the 1st covenant can be understood as a precedent for the course of the conclusion of the 2nd covenant. For these reasons also, the predictions of the Gospels cannot be fulfilled only symbolically! The fulfilment of the first cycle is well known. At that time, an extremely serious social change took place, the temple worship of YHWH ended and so did the very Jewish state, accompanied with a genocide of the Jews and the scattering of their remnant throughout the world. And not only that, Jesus set yet another precedent, the conclusion of the night stage of the 6th day of creation, the "antediluvian age" stage.

Mt 24:37	<i>"As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of man comes." [NJB]</i>
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The apostle Peter further draws attention to this second, very important parallel.

¹The Son of Man is to be on Earth incognito initially and make the necessary preparations. That he is already here (present) will be discernible only by these signs, not by his public appearances (Mt 24:23-27). He will gather around him only the nucleus of a spiritual temple, a kind of 12 apostles [the 12 cornerstones, the administration of the people of the 2nd covenant (Re 21:14); Jesus' apostles will form the basis of the administration of the Jewish nation, the people of the 1st covenant (Mt 19:28; Re 4:4)]. This Christ will remain in anonymity until the last moment and will not build a new church. He is the master of all his property, the administration of which he will entrust to a faithful servant (Mt 24:46,47).

2Pe 3:5-7	<i>"But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word² the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly."</i> [NIV]
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Peter explains that just as certain severe physical circumstances made the flood possible,³ similarly severe unavoidable physical circumstances will cause another cataclysm of the same magnitude. His words also imply that the present world has the protection of the heavens for the time being.⁴ The specific form of the conclusion of our 2nd covenant is unambiguously documented here by precedent. The actual collapse of contemporary civilization is imminent, as many expert sources today do not doubt, even if they do not directly account for the predicted astronomical influences.⁵ Fortunately, it is not only a collapse that is imminent, but also a massive rescue operation planned for the benefit of a significant part of humanity.

2. LIKE A LIGHTNING

Light in the Bible is primarily a symbol of knowledge, but also of truth and goodness. And not only in the Bible. Even our culture uses this symbol, for it is very apt. If one is to see well, to know or to discern something, one needs enough light.

In the Bible, then, this symbol appears in the case of the sons of light (Joh 12:36), light as the understanding of prophecy (2Pe 1:19), or light as the revelation of truth.

Isa 9:2	<i>"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."</i> [NIV]
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Lightning is a light of extraordinary intensity, but of very short duration. Such is also the message of the Son of Man. His message reflects such a profound understanding of the Bible that it is likened directly to a burst of light, to lightning. As we will show in a moment, this signal is set to very effectively divide people (especially Christians) into several categories according to their maturity and ability to act.

2.1. First Stage of Selection

Jesus strongly encourages his disciples to be vigilant and warns against dullness or sleep in the spiritual sense.

Mr 13:35-37	<i>"Keep on the watch, therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether late in the day or at midnight or before dawn or early in the morning, in order that when he comes suddenly, he does not find you sleeping. But what I say to you, I say to all: Keep on the watch."</i> [NWT]
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In the famous parable of the ten bridesmaids (virgins) it even says that they all fell asleep in the end. Nevertheless, some had oil in their lamps and were able to follow the bridegroom (Mt 25:1-12). The principle revealed in this parable explains why the presence of the Son of Man will be like a lightning. For it will be a special selection. The Son of Man seeks suitable associates for the difficult tasks before Him. At this time only the most advanced (capable) of Christians will recognize Him, those who are sufficiently knowledgeable and without prejudice. This is the group of the called (anointed) ones who will constitute the forming "heavens" and appear as angels in Scripture already now (Mt 25:31).⁶ Other Christians will either "sleep through" this signal (because of its short duration) or be so "dazzled" (because of their unpreparedness – being not the called ones) that they will not understand its meaning at all and will underestimate it or reject it altogether. The fact that the new Christ will come as a flash of lightning has a higher meaning than just punishing the "sleepers." The stragglers will not be assigned any tasks at that level of selection because they would be unable to perform them (Mt 25:12).

²The word (or information, knowledge), thus also knowledge of the laws of nature. The waters were brought forth using the knowledge of the laws of nature, not by a magic formula.

³The lifting of a significant portion of water (apparently in the form of a ring in Earth's orbit) to create land was provisional and did not receive a final evaluation. ("And it was good."). The act of creation was not completed. Its completion has not yet occurred (unless this problem has two solutions), the waters fell back to the Earth, which has become mightily wrinkled as a result (Ps 104:6-9). The earth is still largely flooded by the sea. Some astronomers claim that all the planets in the Solar System originally had such rings of ice boulders.

⁴For example, before the impact of asteroids.

⁵When God performs "mighty acts and signs" (often as punishments), He does so by using geophysical, astrophysical or other phenomena. Refer to the destruction of Sodom (Lot had to leave the dangerous area!), the crossing of the Red Sea, the phenomena described in the Book of Revelation, etc.

⁶The word angel also means messenger.

2.2. Second Stage of Selection

A similar selection process will gradually take place at lower levels as well.

Mt 24:45-47	<i>"Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? Happy is that slave if his master on coming finds him doing so! Truly I say to you, he will appoint him over all his belongings."</i> [NWT]
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Again, the most advanced one (here the church) gets his task on the second level, namely the administration of all the Lord's property, all Christians worthy of the name.

2.3. Third Stage of Selection

Mt 25:1-10	<i>"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise... At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'... The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut."</i> [NIV]
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The appointed administrator (leader) will then gather around him ("with a sudden shout" because he will be "awakened" first) the other prepared churches and members of other churches.

The whole situation from another angle looks like this:

Lu 12:35-37	<i>"Be dressed and ready and have your lamps burning, and you should be like men waiting for their master to return from the marriage, so when he comes and knocks, they may at once open to him. Happy are those slaves whom the master on coming finds watching!⁷ Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at the table and will come alongside and minister to them."</i> [NWT]
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2.3.1. The Judgement of God's People

1Pe 4:17	<i>"The time has come for the judgement to begin at the household of God; ..." [NJB]</i>
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The awakened and addressed churches will be the first of mankind to be judged. They must be the first to recognize their condition and errors and show a willingness to make amends in order to successfully continue to cooperate in the project of saving the planet.

2.3.2. Faithful and Wise Servant

When the Gospels describe the search for that "faithful and wise servant" (slave), they explain this judgment as follows:

Mt 24:45-51	<i>"Who really is the faithful and wise slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? Happy is that slave if his master on coming finds him doing so! Truly I say to you, he will appoint him over all his belongings. But if ever that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is delaying,' and he starts to beat his fellow slaves and to eat and drink with the confirmed drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day that he does not expect and in an hour that he does not know, and he will punish him with the greatest severity and will assign him his place with the hypocrites. There is where his weeping and the gnashing of his teeth will be."</i> [NWT]
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This prophecy concerns the leadership of promising churches (the servant is originally faithful and wise). In the words of Jesus, it will be churches or a church whose leadership will "says in his heart" (not publicly), *"My master is delaying."* Such a conclusion is indicative of disappointment after a previous failed attempt to determine, or predict, the Lord's return. If we translate other terms from Christian symbolism into common language, it is clear that the issue is not the alcoholism, but spiritual activities. To divert others' attention from this and many other mistakes (nobody is perfect) and lessen their impact and subsequent scepticism, the leadership of such a church will begin to:

- "beat" his fellow servants (beating spiritually) – they will begin to inappropriately criticize the leadership of other churches so that they can feel "purer" in comparison to the others' "darkness";
- "drink with drunkards" – they will surround themselves with "spiritual drunkards" (sycophants, yes-men) with whom they will drunkenly soothe their conscience and assure themselves of the rightness of their actions (Isa 28:1-15).

⁷Word "happy" (lucky) means undeserved success. So, these church leaders are helped a little by chance, not just by their own merit. A confluence of circumstances will contribute to their "greater alertness" (they will all sleep). So, they must not begin to exalt themselves above those less successful.

This error is not only very serious; it is the only one specifically described. At the time of the Lord's return, therefore, it will be this error that will most endanger the advanced churches, the aspirants to the office of "faithful servant."

Further, the judgment of God's people is described as follows:

Lu 12:47,48	<i>"The servant who knows what his master wants, but has got nothing ready and done nothing in accord with those wishes, will be given a great many strokes of the lash. The one who did not know, but has acted in such a way that he deserves a beating, will be given fewer strokes..." [NJB]</i>
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Jesus explains the criteria by which the churches will be judged:

- the results of the Bible teaching and interpretation program, the quality of "spiritual food at the proper time";
- relationship with other fellow servants;⁸
- quality of morale and willingness to repent (they will be beaten for deeds worthy of beating).

The other "sleeping" and "unawakened" churches become "the unfaithful wife" ("prostitute"; Mt 7:21-23; Re 17:1-6, 18:4).

Note: The criterion of righteousness in the 2nd covenant is not so much continual orderliness or integrity (formally required by the Law), but above all the ability to repent sincerely (Mt 21:31,32). Thus, paradoxically, the "worst" (last) can become the first (Lu 13:30). Christians as a nation have many serious sins on their conscience, just like the Jews. Churches unwilling to repent and make amends will be punished for all these faults according to the precedent described in Matthew (Mt 23:30-36). Churches are not holy!

2.3.3. Summary

Mal 3:1-3	<i>"Look, I shall send my messenger to clear a way before me. And suddenly the Lord whom you seek will come to his Temple; yes, the angel of the covenant, for whom you long, is on his way, says Yahweh Sabaoth. Who will be able to resist the day of his coming? Who will remain standing when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire, like fullers' alkali. He will take his seat as refiner and purifier; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they can make the offering to Yahweh with uprightness." [NJB]</i>
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The Son of Man will come with a mighty spiritual light (Isa 9:2; Lu 17:24), address Christians ready to receive the "anointing" and with their help begin the judgment of God's people according to the precedent of the end of the 1st covenant.

Joh 3:19,20	<i>"Now this is the basis for judgment: that the light has come into the world, but men have loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were wicked. For whoever practices vile things hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his works may not be reproved." [NWT]</i>
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This tribunal will first sort out the churches and select the most advanced one to appoint it as the administrator of all the Lord's property, His people. Next, other "awakened" churches and Christians will begin to join (Mt 25:1-13).

3. PRECURSORS TO THE GREAT TRIBULATION

As conditions on our planet deteriorate, tensions in human society will begin to rise sharply. It is these factors that should be the driving force that will help the Son of Man to quickly call together not only a group of the called ones (His messengers, angels), but also to judge the helpless churches and to select from among them "faithful servant" and "wise bridesmaids (virgins)". Because then:

Lu 21:25,26	<i>"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, ..." [NIV]</i>
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3.1. The Great Tribulation

The extreme irresponsibility of humanity, refusing out of pride to respect the often basic natural and environmental principles, will lead the world, according to biblical predictions, to a state called the **Great Tribulation** in John's Revelation. Jesus drew attention to this situation as follows:

⁸Christians have the task of striving for unity. They are to learn to get along in agape love.

Mt 24:21,22	<i>"For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."</i> [NIV]
Mt 24:29-31	<i>"Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in grief, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from one extremity of the heavens to their other extremity."</i> [NWT]

This dramatic scene is the purpose of all the previous activity of the Son of Man, who wants to make possible the rescue of a large number of people and to shelter them in a safer place. But how to convince such a large number of people that they can be saved?

3.2. Preaching the Gospel and Evacuating the "Great Multitude" – the Fourth Stage of Selection

Jesus' prophecy says that, at the end of times (2nd covenant), there will still be worldwide announcements of the good news. What will it concern?

Mt 24:11-14	<i>"Many false prophets will arise and mislead many; and because of the increasing of lawlessness, the love of the greater number will grow cold. But the one who has endured to the end will be saved. And this good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."</i> [NWT]
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So, the emerging kingdom of the sons of God will be preached to all other people. Since the world situation will look truly hopeless, the bare fact that it is possible to be saved will be glad tidings at this time.

The Book of Revelation describes this situation as follows.

Re 14:6	<i>"Then I saw another angel, flying high overhead, sent to announce the gospel of eternity to all who live on the earth, every nation, race, language and tribe."</i> [NJB]
Re 7:9,10	<i>"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"</i> [NIV]
Re 7:14	<i>"... And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'"</i> [NIV]

According to these words, many people will still convert to Christianity at the last moment, and with what enthusiasm!⁹ For all their hopes will be completely exhausted. Only one will remain, the biblical Christ and his message, which they did not believe or at least did not understand.

4. CONCLUSION

As anyone can verify for himself, the fulfilment of all Bible prophecies in the past has always been in accordance with the prevailing social, psychological, environmental, physical and other laws, and will continue to be so. It can even be said that Bible prophecy is virtually nothing more than a general description of these valid laws and a guide to saving and repairing our world. These laws have been established by God; they are true, and therefore we can count on the success of these prophecies.

Isa 55:11	<i>"So it is with the word that goes from my mouth: it will not return to me unfulfilled or before having carried out my good pleasure and having achieved what it was sent to do."</i> [NJB]
Joh 10:35	<i>"... -and yet the scripture cannot be nullified-"</i> [NWT]

⁹Given existing legal norms, only people who recognize the validity of Christ's atoning sacrifice are truly entitled to salvation (Ro 10:9; 1Jo 4:14,15). God does not force anything on people, not even their salvation.