

# **The Return of Christ – A Single Event at the Very End? 2 Thessalonians 1**

*(The following is the substance of an address given by David Silversides at an after-church meeting at Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007.)*

Our theme is Christ's return – is it a single event at the very end? Our purpose is to consider only this one aspect of biblical prophecy. There are many other elements of biblical prophecy that can be considered but here we are just looking at this one – is the return of Christ a single event that happens at the very end and brings in the end of history and the final eternal state?

We will say at the beginning that our answer will be yes, but over against this positive answer there stand various forms of dispensationalism and premillennialism. I'll explain those in a moment. Two aspects of these views need to be mentioned. One is the idea of a secret rapture of the church by which is meant Christ coming for his saints and they being removed by bodily resurrection and by the removal from the earth of those who are in this world for a period, some say a period of seven years, having been raised from the dead. The idea is that Christ comes for his saints and takes them away, life continues in some form on earth, and then after this period of rapture, Christ returns with his saints to set up the millennium kingdom and the visible kingdom on earth

lasting for a thousand years. Then after that, there is tribulation and the resurrection of the wicked and the final judgment.

The other aspect is that even when the idea of the rapture is rejected, some believe that when Christ comes, it will entail the resurrection of the godly and the setting up of a literal thousand year reign of Christ visibly on earth before the end and the final judgment. Christ comes for his saints then returns with his saints, then there is a visible kingdom of Christ, a millennial reign, and then the end. On this other view there is no rapture but Christ comes and glorifies the saints and reigns visibly on earth for a thousand years during which time various things happen, and then the end. Both these views see Christ as coming before the end, one sees a rapture and a millennial reign, and the other sees simply a millennial reign, but they have this in common, that both would see Christ's return as a straggled business and when Christ comes, it is not then immediately the end of history.

Now our purpose will be to show that Christ's coming is a single event and whenever Christ comes, it will mark the end of history in time and that all that will follow the coming of Christ and the judgment is the eternal state. The resurrection and glorification of the saints and the resurrection and final condemnation of the wicked, that is the judgment of all men and all nations, will take place at this one single event of Christ's return at the very end of history beyond which there is the eternal state in heaven and hell and no more. In other words, there is no

rapture and no visible reign of Christ on earth before the end and the introduction of the final eternal state.

## **1. Christ's Return is a Single Event.**

Christ does not come and go away and come back, and he does not come and reign for a long period on earth and then the end. Christ's reign is a single event, he comes once and once only.

### **a. The Terms 'Coming', 'Revelation', 'Appearing', 'Day of the Lord', and 'That Day.'**

Let us consider that the terms 'coming', 'revelation', 'appearing', 'day of the Lord', and 'that day,' all refer to the same event. One of the arguments used by those who disagree with us is that these terms mean different things. While they may certainly have different aspects of meaning, our point is that they all refer to the same event. Any difference of meaning is simply a description of different aspects of the same thing.

Our starting point is the passage which we read, 2 Thessalonians 1. In verse 7 it says, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance." There he is said to be 'revealed' or literally 'at the revelation from heaven with his mighty angels'. The word 'revelation' is apocalupsis from which we get the word apocalypse. In verses 8 and 9, we are told that when he is revealed, at the apocalypse of Christ, the wicked will be judged, "In flaming fire taking

vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Verse 10 tells us that this will be simultaneous with the glorification of his saints, "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." So the final judgment of the wicked and the final glorification of the saints take place at one and the same time at the revelation, the apocalypse of the Lord Jesus which is also described as 'that day,' one day, so well understood that it can be referred to as 'that day.'

From this passage, 2 Thessalonians 1, we are informed that there is a day, that day that entails the revelation, the apocalypse of the Lord Jesus, when the wicked will be finally condemned and the saints finally glorified. This, you will realize, is inconsistent with the idea of the rapture and so forth.

Then turning to the next chapter, 2 Thessalonians 2, and reading verses 1 and 2, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." Then in verse 8, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." Now in verse 1 we have a reference to the

coming, that is the word 'parousia', the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is evidently the same as the day of Christ in verse 2, and is evidently the same as his coming, his 'parousia' mentioned in verse 8. So this indicates that the day of Christ is the same as the 'parousia', the coming of the Lord.

Turning to 2 Timothy 4:1, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." And in verse 8, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Now in verse 1 you will see that the Lord Jesus judges the 'quick', that is the living, and the dead at his appearing, his 'epiphany', and his kingdom. And in verse 8 you will see that the apostle will receive his final glorification at his appearing, the 'epiphany' of the righteous Judge. So here it is clear that the judgment of the quick and the dead, the epiphany of Christ and the glorification of the saints all take place at one and the same time. They refer to the same event.

The believers are said to look for his appearing, Titus 1:13. They do not only look for his coming, his 'parousia', they look for his appearing, his 'epiphany'.

In 1 Peter 1:7, there is a reference "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of

Jesus Christ." Although the word here is translated 'appearing,' our translators did not actually subscribe to the idea that the different terms referred to some different event and so the translation is not uniform. Here the word is not 'epiphany' but 'apocalupsis', normally translated revelation. And in verse 5, you see "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." So the salvation of God's people, the glorification of God's people, is here said to take place at the apocalypse. So it takes place at the epiphany, the parousia, the apocalypse of the Lord Jesus which is also described as 'that day,' so that these terms all refer to the same event. This apocalypse is also called 'the last time,' 1 Peter 1:5, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." This tells us that the apocalypse, the epiphany, the parousia, that day, the day of Christ, the day of the Lord, the last day, are all referring to the same thing.

In 1 Peter 4:13, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." When his glory shall be revealed, that is, at the apocalypse, the saints' joy will be complete.

So the parousia, the coming, does not refer to something before or distinct from a later apocalypse or revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The day of the Lord is that which all must be ready for. 1 Thessalonians 5:2, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and

safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." It is quite clear that the day of the Lord is something that the people of God are ready for and that the ungodly are not ready for, and that when it comes, it will not only bring joy to the people of God but sudden destruction upon the wicked. So again, this is quite inconsistent with the idea of Christ coming to glorify his people and the wicked remaining unjudged. Because the day of the Lord comes, his people are ready for it. The thief in the night is not talking about secrecy, it is talking about the unpreparedness of the ungodly, just as someone not prepared for a thief. When the Saviour comes, the day of the Lord, then sudden destruction comes upon the wicked.

Matthew 24:42-43, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up." There the Lord Jesus again uses this idea of the thief, the unexpectedness or an unpreparedness of the ungodly.

The idea is also used in 2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and

the works that are therein shall be burned up." Here it is the day of the Lord that is spoken of but again the idea of the thief in the night is used, that same term used of Christ's coming to glorify his saints but the context is at the very end when there is a renewing of the heavens and the earth.

So to bring all this together then, you see in verse 12, "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?"

So the day of the Lord, when the Lord comes, the parousia, the apocalypse, the epiphany of the Lord Jesus entails the glorification of the redeemed and the final judgment of the wicked and the renewing of the heavens and the earth. All these things take place in connection with one single return of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is apparent then, if we compare all the passages that we have looked at and we write out the different terms used, that the coming of the Lord, the appearing of the Lord, the revelation of the Lord, that day, the day of the Lord, the day of God, all refer to the same single event.

#### **b. All are Judged at the Same Time.**

We have seen this from 2 Thessalonians 1 and from 2 Timothy 4 and elsewhere. Let us add to that Matthew 25:31-32, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all

nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." Christ here is the King of the kingdom (verse 34), and he judges all nations and divides between the sheep and the goats, and the outcome is given in the last verse, verse 46, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." So Christ's coming brings universal judgment, eternal punishment, and eternal glory.

The final glorification of the righteous and the final condemnation of the wicked is in line with the previous parable, the parable of the talents. So back in verse 23 of Matthew 25, "His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." And then in verse 30, "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

So the coming of Christ brings final glory and final judgment. The parables of this chapter, Matthew 25, are parables of the kingdom of heaven. Verse 1 of Matthew 25, "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." These parables are about the kingdom of heaven and therefore when we get to verse 31, the kingdom of heaven is about the coming of the Son of man in his glory, verse 31, as the King in verse 34. All these parables are in turn speaking about the day and hour referred to in the previous chapter, Matthew 24:36, "But

of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." That is the day and hour when the Lord comes, verse 42, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." The day and the hour of the Lord's coming is being explained in these parables of the kingdom, the parable of the virgins, the parable of the talents, the parable of the sheep and the goats, and they are about the kingdom of heaven and the bringing in of its glorified state.

It is also clear that the parable of the ten virgins is about the same subject as the parable of the talents and the parable of the sheep and the goats. The parable of the talents and the parable of the sheep and the goats envisage a general judgment and eternal glory and eternal damnation following. This means that the parable of the ten virgins must be consistent with the teaching of the parable of the talents and the parable of the sheep and the goats. They are about the same thing. That helps us to avoid misunderstanding the parable of the ten virgins. When we come to verses 10 and 11 of Matthew 25, "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." This is referring to the same event as the judgment in the parables of the talents and of the sheep and the goats, therefore the idea of the foolish virgins being shut out is not the idea of the

redeemed being taken out of this world and the ungodly being left behind in this world. The idea is not of some being taken and some left to live on in this world. The meaning is of inclusion and exclusion. It should not be made to mean that the foolish virgins represent those who are left behind in this world after the rapture of the redeemed. The idea is not of some being glorified and others left in this world; it is of the true people of God being ushered into the glorified state of the kingdom whilst the foolish and the hypocritical are excluded from it.

When we go on to the next two parables, we are taught what happens to those who are excluded from it. At one and the same time as the saints are glorified, the ungodly are given their portion with the hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth in everlasting punishment. This, in turn, helps us to understand what is in Matthew 24:39, "And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left." Here it is not the idea of the redeemed being taken up to glory and others left to live on in this world. That did not happen in the days of Noah. Those who were not in the ark were judged. We must understand these verses in the light of the parables that follow. They are not talking about the glorification of the redeemed and others left behind to live on in this world. The terminology is meant to convey the inclusion of the

redeemed in the glorified kingdom and the exclusion of those who do not belong to Christ and who will be cast into outer darkness.

To sum up, then, all of these passages either teach or are consistent with Christ's coming as a single event bringing in the glorified state of the redeemed, the final glorified state of the redeemed body and soul, and the final condemnation, body and soul, of the wicked. We are not to press those being 'left' to mean left in this present life. It is the idea of exclusion from the glorified kingdom and no more as the other parables make very clear. So when it comes to 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 17, a very well-known passage, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." It is talking about the eternal state, not a seven year state and then coming back; and it is certainly not secret, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God." We must also understand that the apostle here is dealing only with the resurrection glory of believers. We must not argue from the silence about the wicked that therefore their judgment takes place at some point long beyond this glorification of the people of God. The apostle is dealing with the death of believers, that the Thessalonians should not sorrow as them that have no hope. The text is not dealing with what happens to the

wicked. We must turn to other passages to find out that the wicked are condemned in body and soul at the same time as the redeemed are glorified.

So the final judgment of all takes place when Christ comes. He came once to redeem his people and Hebrews 9:28 tells us he will come a second time for them that look for him without sin unto salvation. He will come a *second* time. He will not come a third time or a fourth time. He came once to go to Calvary to bear the guilt of sin, he comes a second time to complete the salvation of his people. He does not come a second time, go away, and then come back again a third time.

Some object to using the parable of the sheep and the goats because they say it is dealing with the kingdom of heaven, not the kingdom of God, as if they are two different things. Let us just briefly notice that these two terms mean the same thing. In Matthew 13:11 the context is that Christ had just given the parable of the sower, "He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Mark 4:11, the exact same point is made by Christ after the parable of the sower, "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables." No doubt the Lord Jesus is speaking in Aramaic; Matthew and Mark are giving the Greek. One calls it the kingdom of heaven; the other calls it the kingdom of God. The two terms are referring to exactly the same thing.

Turn to Matthew 3:2, "And saying," this is John the Baptist, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Then turn to Mark 1:14-15, "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." The terms 'the kingdom of heaven' and 'the kingdom of God' refer to the same thing and there is only one Gospel of the kingdom, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who talk about these different kingdoms, go on to say there was a Gospel for the kingdom of God, and a Gospel for the kingdom of heaven, with one message for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. They carve up the New Testament and decide which is applicable to us and which is not. That is what happens in the Scofield notes and in the whole dispensational approach.

### **c. The Resurrection of the Righteous and the Wicked Take Place at the Same Time.**

Daniel 12:2, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." This is speaking of a single event, at least that is the most natural understanding of the passage.

John 5:28-29, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the

resurrection of damnation." When Christ says the hour is coming, however you understand the term 'hour,' it is talking about a particular time and both these things shall take place - *all* that are in the grave shall come forth.

Acts 24:15, Paul is speaking before Felix, "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." The most natural sense is to understand it as a single event for both the just and the unjust.

That is the first point, Christ's return is a single event.

## **2. Christ's Return is at the Very End.**

### **a. The Scriptures Teach that Christ is in Heaven until the End.**

Acts 3:19-21, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." The 'times of refreshing' are the times of the renewing of the creation and that is confirmed in verse 21, "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things." The restitution of all things is the renewing of the heavens and the earth and the heavens must receive Christ until the time of the restitution of all things.

1 Corinthians 15:22-26, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then *cometh* the end..." The word "cometh" is in italics because in the Greek it is just, "Then the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." In our Authorized Version our translators were so concerned only to give us what is there in the original language that when in the Hebrew in the Old Testament or the Greek of the New Testament, where they were adding words because it did not quite make sense in English, they put it in italics. That is what the italics are there for. It is saying that this word was put in so that it would make sense in English. So literally it is, "afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."

When Christ raises his people to glory, it is the end and all opposition to Christ is put down in the wrath of the Lamb. This takes place because Christ must reign "till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." That is talking about death as it relates to the people of God. Christ having purchased all the blessings of salvation for his people, applies redemption, renewing their hearts, bringing them to faith, forgiving the guilt of their sins, sanctifying them,

making them perfect in holiness, when absent from the body and present with the Lord in heaven. Then the final part of redemption applied is the resurrection of the body and that is the last enemy that shall be destroyed. He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet and death is the last. That means he must reign until the resurrection of his people. How come, then, on this other view, death is not the last enemy because after the resurrection of God's people, there are all sorts of other things going on on earth? No, the resurrection of God's people is the end because then the wicked will be raised to shame and everlasting contempt.

The idea of Christ coming back into this world with unjudged sin existing, is incompatible with the exaltation of the Redeemer. He is no longer in the state of humiliation and there will be no return, even in that measure, to the state of humiliation by Christ coming into this world again with sin still present and damnation not issued.

### **b. Christ's Coming will be Seen by All.**

Furthermore this coming of the Lord is certainly no secret. 1 Corinthians 15:52, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." These stories you hear, that ungodly people will wake up and suddenly find people have disappeared, are nonsense. The trumpet shall sound. Everybody will know what is happening.

Revelation 1:7, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." Every eye shall see him. The day of the Lord brings a new heavens and a new earth. There is nothing secret about this at all.

### **c. Christ's Coming and the Resurrection of his People are at the Last Day.**

The 'last days' (plural) are the whole period between Christ's first coming and his return. The 'last days' is not a description of things at the very end of time. The last days began when Christ came to redeem his people. Hebrews 1:1, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." So when people say, "Don't you think we are in the last days?" - The answer is, "Of course we are. We have been in the last days for the last number of centuries since Christ came into the world to redeem sinners." The term 'the last days' is used in Scripture of the whole New Testament age between Christ's first coming and the whole of his reign at the right hand of God until he returns in glory. That is why in Acts 2:16 the Apostle Peter says, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." He is saying Pentecost signalled that we are in the last days and Joel's prophecy is being fulfilled.

In 1 Peter 1:20 speaking of Christ, "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." Peter, writing in the first century to first century Christians, says that Christ has been manifest in these last times. Peter was living in the last times.

That is why the Apostle John in 1 John 2:18 says, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." John did not write that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was in the first century. People pick up the Bible as if it was written yesterday. It was not, it was written in the first century and John says it is the last time.

So these terms, the last time, the last days, are used to describe the whole period between Christ's first coming and his return in glory. The time of his return is called the last day. So we are in the last days and Christ will come at the last day, and there are no days beyond the last otherwise words have lost their meaning. John 6:39, "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." Verse 44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." Verse 54, "Whoso

eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

So when are the redeemed raised to glory? At the last day. There are no seven years post-rapture going on in this world. There is no visible reign on earth with days going on after the resurrection of the redeemed. They are raised at the *last* day so there are no more days, there is only eternity and that tells us that the wicked must be judged and the new heavens and the new earth must come in at the same time as Christ comes to glorify his people. In John 12:48, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." So Christ's word will judge his despisers at the last day. The redeemed are raised to glory at the last day. There are no days to come after this, only the eternal state.

### **3. Two Passages where People often Go Wrong.**

#### **a. Zechariah 14:4**

"And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south." The context is important. Chapters 12 and 13 of this prophecy deal with Christ's redeeming work and its application by

the Spirit, particularly to the Jews but it is referring to the blessing of the Spirit bringing sinners to the knowledge of Christ.

Some apply this to the final judgment and they say that verses 1 and 2 refer to the nations gathering around the literal Jerusalem. Well, the first thing is that this does not parallel the passages that deal with Gog and Magog surrounding the holy city because those passages speak simply of them surrounding the holy city, whereas this is speaking of them going into the holy city and rifling it and so on.

But secondly, Jerusalem here represents the church of God afflicted by its enemies. That is true also of the passage in Revelation 20, Gog and Magog, it is Jerusalem. There it is talking about the final assault on the church, here it is talking about the ongoing troubles of the church in this world and how the Lord will look after his people. Jerusalem represents the church of God. The Lord standing on the Mount of Olives means the Lord seeing all, and his coming for the deliverance of his people. It is simply telling us that in the midst of the church's history as the enemy afflicts the church of God, Christ will look after his people and will see the travail of his soul and preserve his own cause and truth in the earth and will gather in his elect and preserve them from every evil work. The references to Jerusalem are the same as in Revelation 21 where the heavenly Jerusalem descends from heaven, or in Hebrews 12:22, the children of Jerusalem which is from above. That is why in Acts 15, we

have James answering in verse 13, "Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." There James applies the passage in Joel concerning the raising up of the tabernacle of David, not to some building the third temple in Jerusalem, not at all, but rather he applies it to what was happening then, the ingathering of the Gentiles into the church of God under the Kingship of the gracious Saviour, the son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want to know how to interpret Scripture, look at the New Testament passages which interpret Old Testament Scripture for us and then you learn how other passages should be handled. So those passages which talk of Jerusalem and of the tabernacle and so on, are referring to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and the ingathering of Jew and Gentile into the church of God.

#### **b. Revelation 20:4**

The other passage is Revelation 20:4. We read from verse 1, "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand

years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." There is no indication in this passage that it refers to Christ returning and physically reigning on earth. For a fuller explanation of this passage, see chapter 12 of this book. Suffice it to say here that it is not referring to Christ physically returning to earth and the physical resurrection of his people and an earthly reign of Christ and then the raising of the wicked before the end because there is still Satan's little season. It is actually referring to the cause of truth flourishing, that cause for which the martyrs were beheaded, flourishing in the earth and then the final resurgence of wickedness before the coming of the Lord Jesus. It is not talking about the return of Christ visibly and physically on the earth. It is talking about the progress of the Gospel and the resurgence of wickedness in the midst of the earth.

There is a general principle here. The book of Revelation is full of symbolism and it is full of the use of Old Testament history to signify things to come. To start with Revelation 20 is a mistake. You start with the

straightforward passages like 2 Thessalonians 1 and then when you have got the basic things from the clear passages in place, you are in a position to look at the book of Revelation without the danger of making a botch of it and going off on strange tangents that are not supported by the rest of Scripture. But suffice it to say that that passage is not speaking about Christ's return but it is speaking about the advance and resurgence of the Gospel and the final conflict before the return of Christ.

To conclude, then, the return of Christ is a single event at the very end, and this means that all that is promised of Christ's kingdom of grace and the Gospel advancing among the nations in such passages as Isaiah 60, must take place before Christ returns. So the passages which speak about the advance of the Gospel among the nations, that must take place while Christ is still at the right hand of the Father and the Gospel is preached accompanied by the power of the Spirit sent down from heaven because when Christ comes, it is the end. All who are converted are converted either during Christ's earthly ministry in his state of humiliation or with the Incarnate Christ, unseen but glorified at the right hand of the Father. The idea of sinners being converted in the presence of a now glorified Christ returning to earth is simply not scriptural. We are converted to an unseen glorified Christ. Others were converted and brought to faith by a visible Christ in his state of humiliation but not by the presence of a glorified Christ having already returned to this earth. When sinners see the glorified Christ, they will not be converted, they shall wail because

of him and the Gospel shall be made known to them never again. When Christ comes, he comes once, and when he comes, it is the end.