

## **Demanding Evidences Why Christ Returned As And When He Said He Would**

by John Noe

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This material was originally presented and read as a theological paper at the 48th Annual Meeting of The Evangelical Theological Society, November 1996, in Jackson, Mississippi. It was titled:  
THE REFORMATION AND RESTORATION OF JOHN 16:13

Why the 1st-century Church Wasn't Misled or Mistaken in Their Expectation of Christ's Return

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is to come."

– John 16:13

Biblical scholars agree, almost without exception, that every New Testament writer and the members of the 1st-century Church expected that Christ would return within their lifetime. Possessing the Holy Spirit, this immediacy was their Spirit-guided expectation of imminency. It was the product of the Spirit's disclosing work (also see Jn. 14:25). But if they were misguided or wrong on such a crux issue as Christ's return, what else might they have been mistaken about, as well? And, therefore, how can we possibly trust them to convey other aspects of the faith along to us -- such as the requirements for salvation, etc?

### **The Enigma and Dilemma of "Non-occurrence"**

For nearly 2,000 years the vast majority of the Church has still been eagerly expecting, proclaiming and some predicting the "soon" and "any moment" return of Jesus Christ. All the while, we've struggled with the enigma and dilemma of "non-occurrence" and tried to maintain the pretense of inerrancy, infallibility and inspiration of Scripture -- an impossible, if not harmful, balancing act.

Conservative scholarship postulates that Jesus' coming again has been delayed or postponed. Liberal scholarship reckons Jesus and the New Testament writers were simply mistaken or deluded. Other liberals think Jesus never made certain time-restricted statements in Scripture, but these words were altered or later added by His followers. Of course, such a conclusion does not remain in isolation. Like gangrene, it spreads and opens the door to question [and dismiss] the authenticity of many other sayings of Christ, as well as the whole issue of Bible inerrancy.

Most Christians don't seem to realize the predicament we are in if Jesus Christ has not come again within the time parameters He Himself specified and as the Holy Spirit guided the early believers to expect. Informed critics of Christianity have no trouble seeing right through the strained attempts of Church leaders to explain away the enigma of "non-occurrence" and our exegetic charades to protect the credibility and divinity of Jesus in the face of His supposed "failure to return." These critics also are quite aware of the dilemma "non-occurrence" presents for the Christian Church and the impossibility of escaping it without being disloyal to Christ:

**Bertrand Russell** Well-known atheist, Bertrand Russell, in his book, Why I Am Not A Christian, discredits the inspiration of the New Testament by saying: "I am concerned with Christ as He appears in the Gospel narrative as it stands, and there one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise. For one thing, He certainly thought that His second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at the time. There are a great many texts that prove it...where it is quite clear that He believed that His coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living. That was the belief of His earlier followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of His moral teaching."

**Albert Schweitzer** In his book, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, Schweitzer summarized it this way: "The whole history of Christianity down to the present day... is based on the delay of the Parousia, the non-occurrence of the Parousia, the abandonment of eschatology, the process and completion of the 'de-eschatologizing' of religion which has been connected therewith."

**Jewish Critics** Jewish critics contend Jesus didn't complete the entire mission of the Messiah, though many admit He fulfilled some of it. That's why, in their opinion, He's definitely not the Messiah. Or, that's why He's only the Messiah for the Gentiles. This is the Jews' primary excuse for rejecting Jesus and belittling Christianity.

**Muslim Critics** Most Muslims acknowledge Jesus as a prophet, but seek to discredit His Deity and destroy the credibility of Christianity by pointing out alleged errors and inconsistencies contained in the Bible concerning His non-return. They recognize the logical implications of the Bible's time statements as having a direct bearing on the Messianic and divine claims of Christ. But Jesus and the apostles must have lied about His imminent return and other eschatological matters, they argue. Or, if Jesus sincerely prophesied His time-restricted return and it has not been fulfilled, then He is a false prophet. The net result is to crumble the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible and open the door for the acceptance of the Koran and Islam.

**Scoffers** In the New Testament, Jewish scoffers pointed to the continuation of everything [the Temple, city and priesthood] as evidence Jesus didn't come back as He promised. No visible changes were evident. Consequently, there appeared to be no substance to the law-free Gospel the early Christians were preaching. These scoffers doubted the sureness of Christ's promise, viewed Christianity as a perversion of Israel's future and mockingly asked, "Where is this coming He promised?" (2 Pet.3:3-4; Jude 16-19). Peter speaks quite negatively of these scoffers and their concept of a "delay." Back then, that delay was only about thirty-some years. The current, 19-centuries-long-and-continuing delay now makes those original scoffers look pretty good, doesn't it? Then hasn't history proven the scoffers were right?

**Complicity in the Christian Camp** Many of today's traditionalists, in essence, have aligned themselves with the 1st-century scoffers. They've become unwilling accomplices of all the above critics. A definite, similar conclusion exists -- Jesus hasn't returned as and when He promised. The standard Christian answer has been to insist Jesus will come again [return], someday, and finish the job. But this proves the critics' point: Jesus was incorrect in His time-restricted predictions and cannot be the Messiah.

### **Seven Demanding Evidences Difficult To Deny**

I affirm that the foundational doctrine of the return of Jesus Christ is non-negotiable. But these critiques from the above informed critics, at least, should stir some sober reflections and give those of us in the Church cause to pause and reflect. Are we so blind to the implications of "non-occurrence" and a "continually delayed" coming of Christ? Is it true? Or, is it a self-inflicted wound? Whichever it is, it sure has eroded Christian credibility and provided unbelievers all the evidence they need for concluding that truth does not reside in Scripture or in the Person of Christ.

Is there a possible solution to this sharp, two-horned dilemma and extremely troubling enigma of "non-occurrence?" Are there any options that may have been overlooked? Is there anything different we can offer, especially now as we close in on the turn of millennium and the possibility of a barrage of more failed predictions for a circa 2,000 A.D. return? Perhaps the most obvious solution has been staring us in the face all these many centuries and we've failed to see it. This theological paper will look at seven scriptural and demanding evidences why Jesus DID RETURN within the generation which was alive during His earthly ministry, just as and when He said He would and just as and when the Holy Spirit guided and told His followers to expect. Is this proposition too uncomfortable or too threatening to consider? Truth is often a frightening prospect. But if this is true, then it's the reformation and restoration of John 16:13 that's needed. So, "Come now, let us reason together" (Is. 1:18).

### **Evidence #1 -- Emphatic Time Statements of Jesus --**

The strongest possible evidence remains Jesus' own, emphatic time statements. He didn't leave any doubts. His words were clear, concise, and unequivocal. They were not conditional, elastic or relative. He didn't say "maybe" or "possibly" or "someday" or "one day" or "in 2,000 years" or "in 10,000 years." Jesus' spoke in a plain, straight-forward manner to the ordinary people of His day -- not in a complex manner which might only be understood by trained theologians or linguists. In frequent statements, He confirmed the certainty and faithfulness of His eschatological coming and locked in its time parameter. These words of Jesus are some of the clearest in the New Testament, if we take them at face value. If we try to make them mean something other than what they plainly say, they are some of the most puzzling. As we read through a few of these verses, honestly ask yourself, if you had been a 1st-century disciple hearing these words, how would you have understood them -- especially concerning the time of His coming?

**Matthew 26:64** -- Quoting from the prophet Daniel, Jesus responded to and forewarned the high priest and the Sanhedrin saying, "In the future you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Jesus' "you" was "them." He was speaking in the first-person, directly to them. Caiaphas, the high priest, and all present were familiar with this biblical language. They were the ones who would "see" His return in catastrophic judgment and His glory displayed in the destruction of their precious religious institutions. How could Jesus possibly have been describing an event some 2,000 years in the future? The text demands immediate impact and fulfillment in their lifetime.

**Matthew 10:23** -- While talking with His disciples, Jesus declared, "But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes."

The obvious meaning of Jesus' words was not to deceive His disciples, but to assure them that during the persecution which was to soon to come upon "them," they would not run out of places to flee for safety before He returned.

**Matthew 16:28** -- He informed His disciples, "For truly, I say to you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Here, Jesus is describing the same event. As we shall see, a 40-year period was to transpire between the time He ascended to heaven and came back in His kingdom. During that time some of His disciples died, but others remained alive.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Matthew 24:(3), 30, 34** -- Jesus plainly linked the time of His coming to the destruction of the Temple, "At that time the sign of the Son of Man [Jesus] will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory... I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

Jesus here uses the very same phrase His disciples had just heard Him speak to the scribes and Pharisees when He told them the guilt of the blood of the righteous would fall upon "this generation" (Mt. 23:35-36). Jesus' "this generation," in every New Testament usage, always means the contemporaries of Jesus alive at that time.

**Luke 21:6, 22, 27, 32** -- Furthermore, in Luke's gospel, Jesus pegged the fall of Jerusalem, the end of the Jewish age and His coming as the time frame for the fulfillment of "all things that are written."

Get the point? I seriously doubt that any of Jesus' disciples or hearers would have placed His coming in glory outside of the lifetime of some then present. Thus, the 1st Century should pinpoint when everything Jesus promised either did or didn't come to pass. If Jesus was wrong, He wasn't inspired, nor a prophet of God (Deut. 18:21-22), nor the Messiah, either. There is no valid way to escape it. The texts demand it. It's the teaching of imminency. Even appealing to the unknown time statement, "of that day and hour knoweth no man" (Mt.24:36; 25:13) doesn't preclude nor override the nearness and time-restriction factor. After all, how much time can pass before the unknown loses the nearness of "this generation" and becomes invalid? Certainly not 19-plus centuries? But just like the 9-month gestation period for the birth of a baby, nobody knows the day or the hour, either. That's why Jesus gave signs whereby His disciples could know that these tough times would not last forever and His coming was very close within that generation, even though they could not know the "day or hour."

For postponement traditionalists, these above prophecies [and others] concerning Christ's coming have proven especially perplexing. But why fight them? Why not just take Jesus' time-restricted statements at face value, literally? Every New Testament writer, the early Church believers and even the unbelieving Jews did exactly that. They never imagined that He might be referring to a distant coming some 2,000 years from then. In the words of the old hymn, Tis So Sweet:

"Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,  
Just to take Him at His word,  
Just to rest upon His promise,  
Just to know, `Thus saith the Lord'"

The facts are, the majority of Christians since Bible times have not done this. On the contrary, we've tried every means imaginable to reconcile, avoid, get around, discount, twist, divide up, muddle, or change the obvious and natural meaning of Jesus' words. The classic example is claiming Jesus' "this generation" means a "race," or "type" of people, or some unborn "future generation" – thus abandoning a literal hermeneutic. These non-literal manipulations of Jesus' clear and concise words and His time statements are necessitated by our preconceived notions about the nature of His coming. And, since we haven't seen anything like what we are looking for, we arbitrarily adjust our timing some 19 centuries and counting, in order to fit our notions of its nature. We'd be better advised to honor the time indicators given by Jesus and the inspired writers and adjust our notions. It's difficult, however, to be this objective when we've been subscribing to traditional, postponement views for so long.

Think about it, though. Why wouldn't Jesus have said what He meant and meant what He said? Why must we make excuses for Him? Remember, Jesus also said it was the "evil servant" who says "My Lord delayeth his coming" (Mt. 24:48). And, the Church has been preaching "delay" for 19 centuries and counting.

### **Evidence #2: Equally Emphatic Imminency Statements and Expectations of Christ's 1st-Century Followers**

In addition to taking Jesus at His word, we'd be well advised to take all New Testament writers at their word, too. In the following selected examples, these inspired writers were not just expressing a hope. They emphatically were declaring inspired truth. Again, if they were wrong, they weren't inspired:

**James** – James told the 1st-century followers of Christ to be patient "until the coming of the Lord." And that "the Lord's coming is at hand" (Js. 5:7, 8). With the same language, the arrival of the kingdom of God had been declared. It arrived within months of being announced by John The Baptist as "at hand" (Mt. 3:2 Greek: engys -- graspable). Jesus used this "at hand" idiomatic phrase, too, for the same purpose of declaring close proximity – spatially, or immediacy – temporally (Mt. 4:17; 10:7; also 26:18, 45, 46; Jn. 2:13). Were James' readers [and we today] to re-interpret the meaning of James' use of this time perspective terminology differently – i.e. a 2,000-year elasticity? Or, are we to think that an inspired writer of the Bible would be trying to fool his audience with a different meaning of known words? Of course not. He issued no disclaimers. James' "at hand" demands the same "right there" or "almost right there," immediacy as all its other uses.

Some interpreters rationalize a long gap of delay by ascribing to God a time scale different from our own [such as the infamous "a day equals a thousand years" (2 Pet. 3:8)<sup>(2)</sup>]. Not only does this tactic strip Scripture of its graspable meaning, it gives it a character of deception rather than revelation. God's Word does not speak to man according to man's understanding of time and then act according to a different scale. For God to inspire men to write words that

meant nearness and imminence to man, but in reality meant a long time [multi-centuries], would be deceitful, double-talk and grossly inconsistent on God's part. If He did this, then Bible time statements could not be taken seriously and the integrity of Scripture would be impugned. But we can trust God's time statements, completely. Be assured that God inspired the writers of Scripture to communicate using human language, that would be clearly understood in its plain sense by the common person. That's why, when God meant a "long time," He inspired the use of those type words. In Daniel 8:26, 10:14; 12:2-9, for example, a "long time" was 400-600 years. In Jeremiah 29:10,28 it was 70 years. In Numbers 24:17f, the Redeemer was "not near." Whenever God meant a "short time," He used plain, normal, ordinary imminency phrases and words like "at hand," "near," "at the door," "soon," "shortly," etc. These are terms that communicate time truth to human beings, and were well understood. Their meanings cannot be stretched a thousand years or more in order to protect a theological bias or agenda.

No principle of interpretation can grossly elasticize or eliminate such plain statements of time. If we are willing to take that kind of "liberty" with the time statements of Scripture, be prepared for someone to say that Jesus isn't necessarily THE way and THE truth and THE life" (Jn. 14:6). But only a way. After all, it's the same "doesn't-mean-what-it-plainly-says" liberty and destructive logic. Instead, why not just trust James' "at hand" time statement and adjust our understanding, accordingly?

**The Writer of Hebrews** -- "In just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay," stated the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 10:37). This time statement, likewise, is indicative of the nearness and certainty of that same great consummating event. Like the others, it can not be ignored, twisted or lightly brushed aside. Where then, is the justification for a two-millennia-and-counting gap between this declaration of imminency, its nearness "as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25) and its fulfillment in the lives of this "you" group? 2,000 years is longer than the covenant nation of Israel even existed. That amount of time lapse surely must be considered a "delay." Yet, all of Jesus' parables depicting His coming again included a long interval but only "long" within the lifetime of its hearers, not long after their deaths or a long time in the history of the world. Once more, let's not forget it was the evil servant, Jesus said, who says "My Lord delayeth His coming" (Mt. 24:48).

**Paul** -- Paul blatantly led his contemporaries to believe that some of them would survive and still be "alive and left" on planet Earth and bid that their [physical, soma] bodies would be "kept blameless" until the coming of the Lord (1 Th. 4:17; 5:23-24). If they all died without receiving Paul's promise, and their bodies weren't kept but decayed in graves, then doesn't his inspiration fail, too? Paul further told Timothy to "keep the commandment...until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:14). He did NOT tell Timothy to keep it until he [Timothy] died. In all of Paul's writings including 1 Corinthians 15, he evidently had no need to clarify that he was referring to the nearness of any other coming or end different from that taught by Jesus in His Olivet Discourse. Paul clearly anticipated the imminent return of Christ in his lifetime – had he not been killed – and in the lifetime of his hearers. The plain grammatical meaning of Paul's often-used "we" (1 Th. 4:15-17), and the saturation of his epistles with nearness expectations and exhortations, allow no other conclusion, if we're honest readers (Rm. 13:12; Ph. 4:5; Gal. 4:4; 1 Cor. 7:29, 31).

**Peter** -- In his two epistles, Peter similarly admonished and exhorted his hearers and readers to holy living and to hang in there for "a little while" (1 Pet. 1:6; 5:10; compare with Jn. 16-19). This was to be "until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:5) of "these last times" (1 Pet. 1:20). Peter is referring to the same identical, 1st-century time frame as all the other New Testament writers. That's why throughout, Peter employs the personal pronoun "you." Peter's "you" in it's normal, face-to-face, customary context means "them," his contemporaries. It's not used editorially, as some argue, to apply to just anyone, anytime. Here, and elsewhere, whenever we modern-day interpreters have to stray away from the normal meaning of words or create new definitions of familiar and natural words apart from their customary usage, something is dreadfully wrong. It's a flawed hermeneutic to make the personal pronouns in Peter's (et al.) letters, who would experience these eschatological events, refer to some other group or us in the 20th Century. The Bible's time-statement phrases of imminency and personal pronouns where addressed to a then and there, present and alive group. They mean what they plainly say in that context. This was the most effective and natural way for God to communicate what was soon coming upon those 1st-century people. In no stretch of the imagination does a 2,000- years-and-counting time lapse do justice to Peter's "a little while," or justify his sense of urgency for his target audience.

**Like a Thief** -- Jesus' coming was often compared to "like a thief" (Mt. 24:43; 1 Th. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). The reason for the thief comparison was that no one could know the precise time [day or hour]. But Jesus' followers were NOT to be the ones caught off guard (1 Th. 5:4). His disciples could watch and see "the day" approaching by discerning the signs versus those who "slept" and did not discern the signs (Heb. 10:25; 1 Th. 5:5-6). Moreover, Paul wrote and admonished 1st-century believers that that day should not overtake "them" [not some future generation] as a thief (1 Th. 5:4). A second reason for this comparison is, one doesn't concern one's self about a thief coming in a distant future, only with a thief coming in one's lifetime – which the Bible states is 70-80 years (Ps. 90:10). A 2,000-year delay violates both the imagery, sense of urgency and contemporary significance of this descriptive phrase.

Clearly, the in-their-lifetime imminency for the occurrence of the coming again of Jesus Christ was the central motif of New Testament teaching and the uniform expectation of the early Church. Just how many times, in how many ways, and using how many inspired words and phrases must the New Testament express this 1st-century imminency

before we bow our knee in submission and cease persisting in our preconceived, postponement notions? This language of nearness is very significant and plainly forbids the passing of a protracted period of time. Then were the NT writers grossly mistaken? Falsely led? Deceived? Disappointed? Or, did the Holy Spirit fail to do His job? All such options pose an intolerable dilemma. Without question, the Holy Spirit's guidance is one of the strongest arguments and demanding evidences that the 1st-century expectations of the early Church were correct and fulfilled. But, there's more.

### **Evidence #3 -- The Long Biblical Precedence**

Jesus specified exactly HOW He would be revealed or come again. Several times He said He would "come on the clouds." What does that mean? If you were a 1st-century Jew raised in the synagogue, you would have known exactly what it meant. Why? Because a long and well-established biblical precedence existed [and still exists] for cloud-coming phraseology. To appreciate this Jewish perspective, we must put on the mind of a 1st-century Jew and think like they thought. The Jews of Jesus' day would have viewed these words and their fulfillment from the background of their own history and the Old Testament Scriptures. If we only look at these things through 20th-century eyes, we'll be doomed to what has become traditional confusion.

Christ's "coming on the clouds" is a metaphoric phrase borrowed from Old Testament portrayals of God descending from heaven and coming in power and glory to execute judgment on ancient wicked nations and cities, and in deliverance of His people. In all of God's historic comings in judgment He acted through the means of armies or nature to bring destruction upon His enemies. These divine comings in judgment were direct acts of God and largely described in figurative language. They brought historical calamity and/or a fall upon a nation or a peoples who had come against God's chosen people. We can read about several of God's many comings in judgment, often termed "the day of the Lord," in:

- The deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 3-14)
- The destruction of Judah by Assyria (Amos 3, 5, 8)
- The destruction and captivity of Israel by Babylon (Zeph. 1; Jer. 2-25)
- The destruction of Egypt by Babylon (Eze. 30-32)
- The destruction of Babylon by Medo-Persia (Is. 13)
- The judgment upon Edom by Arab tribes (Is. 34; Mal. 1:2-5; Obad.)

The Jews of Jesus' day studied the use of "cloud" phraseology in their synagogues and were well familiar with its application to the above historic fulfillments.<sup>(3)</sup> Its similes and figurative language portrayed God's divine intervention, presence, power and wrath, and, most often, His use of human armies as His means of judgment – (see Isaiah 19:1; Jer. 4:13; Eze. 30:3, 18; Psalm 18:9- 12; 68:4; 104:3-4; 2 Samuel 22:10-12; Nahum 1:3; Zeph. 1:14-15). With this same cloud-coming imagery [specifically, "coming on the clouds"], the Son of man was prophesied by Daniel to come (Dn. 7:13). And, Jesus derived His speech about His "coming on the clouds" at the end of the age in His Olivet Discourse directly from Daniel. Thus, it was a technical way to speak of Christ also coming in judgment, strength and power of war, in exactly the same way as the Father (Mic.1:3). It's against this background from which Jesus' disciples would have understood what He was talking about in His Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24:30). It's how the high priest would have interpreted Jesus' warning, too (Mt. 26:64). And, let's note that Jesus issued no disclaimers or changes of meaning in citing this type of coming. Neither should we.

One other very important factor we also should note is, in all these real, legitimate and biblical comings of God in the Old Testament, God was **NEVER PHYSICALLY VISIBLE!** Yet, in every instance, human "eyes" could readily "see" or be aware of His Presence and decisive, personal intervention in these events of history. Obviously, this Jewish perspective is quite different from the way we moderns have been conditioned [or have assumed] to think of Christ's "coming on the clouds." But each and every biblical instance of a cloud- type of coming is a legitimate and real coming of God! And, Jesus employed this same "cloud" language in a consistent fashion in His prophecies. If we don't know or appreciate our biblical history, as well as this precedent typology, we'll be hopelessly lost on this core element of our faith and miss its fulfillment in its immediate historical context – as so many have done.

"Behold he [Christ] cometh with the clouds" -- Revelation 1:7

### **Evidence #4 -- Fits Pattern of Other Apocalyptic Language**

Jesus and the writers of the New Testament also employed the other apocalyptic language used by the Old Testament prophets to describe these many comings of "the day of the Lord" [i.e. "collapsing universe," – sun and moon darkened, fire, stars falling, sky rolling up, heavens rotting away, earth-moving, shaking etc.].

But when we look at the Old Testament history of fulfillment of this cosmic catastrophic language, we do not find these things literally or visibly happening. Instead, we find this cosmic terminology figuratively depicting the impending judgment, the utter devastation and complete eclipse of powerful political oppressors and sinful nations who oppose God and His people (Is. 13, 24, 34; Micah 1; Zeph. 1; Ob.; Joel 1-2; Eze. 7-10; 2 Sam. 22). It sounds like the "end-of-the-world," but none of these acts of God were universe-destroying or time-ending events. The use of this apocalyptic language obviously transcended its literalism. It is used to describe real events caused by the direct intervention of God which cannot be fully comprehended in human language.

Only understood in this way, could the Thessalonians, for example, ever have been confused that that "the day of the Lord" had already come (2 Th. 2:1-2). Had they been taught the 20th-century concept you and I [probably] have been taught – i.e. end-of-the-world, cosmic cataclysm, universally visible stuff – there would have been no way anyone

could have confused them that that Day had already happened. Moreover, Paul, in correcting their error, did not correct their understanding of the nature of that event. Rather, he built on the knowledge and understanding of his hearers and only corrected the time issue (also see 1 Th. 5:1-4). Therefore, their concept of "the day of the Lord" [i.e. the invisibility of the coming of the Lord] must have been the right one. There is no other plausible answer. It's consistent with the long historical precedent and usage of this apocalyptic language by the prophets. And, neither Jesus nor any New Testament writer gave any hint that their use of this same language should be interpreted any differently. Therefore, no biblical grounds for an assumption otherwise is justified.

The literalness this presenter recommends for understanding the meaning of God's time statements, however, can not be used in the interpretation of the nature of fulfillment when symbolic biblical language with a long biblical precedent is employed. Jesus was always correcting the physical literalism of how various people interpreted His teachings. For example: "the temple of His body," "born again," "a well of water springing up to eternal life," "cutting off hands and poking out eyes" just to mention a few. Instead, we would be wise to think like 1st-century, Jewish believers. They were much more Old Testament, apocalyptic-oriented than we. And, they knew that behind every descriptive symbol, image or figure of speech was a literal reality. Therefore, whenever the literal reality of a "day of the Lord" came, they knew it would be unmistakably evident and theophanic in nature, as it had been many times before. And, so it was, again.

#### **Evidence #5 -- In the Same Way, the Immediate Historical Setting**

Using the same figures of speech and apocalyptic language, and in keeping with the long biblical precedent of a coming of "the day of the Lord," we can scripturally and historically document how Jesus' coming again was accomplished – in exactly the same way.

First, history records, quite literally, that Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in 70 A.D. "Not one stone" [was] "left upon another," just as Jesus had said (Mt. 24:2). Jesus also had conjoined His coming with this historical event (Mt. 24:1-34). The force of His linkage cannot be overstated. And, contrary to a highly questionable and problematic hermeneutic of dividing up Jesus' Olivet Discourse [part to 70 A.D. and part yet-future] as is employed by some postponement traditionalists, we'd be well advised to heed the unity of Matthew 24, and apply what Christ said about the unity of marriage, that what God [Christ] has joined together, let not man put asunder, divide or separate (Mt. 19:6). No honest interpreter, unimpeded by tradition, has the freedom to weave in and out of time contexts at will, including this one.

Secondly, the prophet Ezekiel said that in the latter days God would come up against Israel "as a cloud to cover the land" (Eze. 38:16). New Testament writers confirmed they were then living in those "last days" (Heb. 1:2; Acts 2:17; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Ti. 3:1; Jas. 5:3; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18; 1 Jn. 2:18). At that time, Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come robed "with the garments of vengeance for clothing" (Is. 59:17f; also see Rm. 12:19), and He would proclaim not only salvation but, "the day of vengeance of our God" (Is. 61:2). Thus, Jesus' statement in Luke's Olivet Discourse contains this very wording, "When you [them] see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near...flee... For these be the days of vengeance [time of punishment] in which all things that are written must be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:20-22). 66-70 A.D. proved to be that immediate historical setting and explicit framework for these happenings.

Thirdly, Isaiah further foretold that at the time when Israel would fill up the measure of her sin, she would be destroyed (Is. 65:6-15) by the Lord Who would come with fire and judgment (Is. 66:15f). Thus, 70 A.D. precisely pinpointed when everything Jesus promised, and Ezekiel and Isaiah [Daniel, too] either did or didn't come to pass. If they were wrong, they weren't inspired. Again, there is no valid way to escape it. As this historical time approached, James said, "The Judge is standing at the door." And, "The coming of the Lord is at hand" (Js. 5:9,8). How long in our traditional view are we going to leave Judge Jesus standing at the door? Paul reminded his readers, "the time is short" (1 Cor. 7:29). How long is short, anyway? Peter in perfect, 1st-century harmony proclaimed, "The end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7), and warned, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). Urgency permeates Peter's sense of expectation. He's emphatic, "THE TIME HAS COME"! John wrote in his day: "IT IS THE LAST HOUR!" (1 Jn. 2:18b). How much more clear can statements be? How many "last hours" can there be? How many more emphatic declarations are required before we are willing to bring our postponement biases and delay-gap concepts into line with inspired imminency?

It's all too clear, if we aren't looking through a futurist veil. There is no need to explain away any of the above scriptures. Nor should we be surprised that God chose to send Christ in judgment to destroy Jerusalem in 70 A.D. in the same way He had come out of heaven many times before in Old Covenant times "with myriads of holy ones" (Deut. 33:2). Now, in New Testament times, Jesus came out of heaven to judge the very people to whom He had spoken (Mt. 23:33-36), after He had gone back to heaven and the time of grace upon the Jewish nation had elapsed (Mt. 27:25; 2 Th. 1:7-8; Jude 14; Rm. 11:26; Is. 59: 20-21; 27:9). It's a fact of biblical/redemptive history. All Jesus' prophetic words and those of every New Testament writer can be plainly understood, in our day, as true and fulfilled prophecy.

#### **Evidence #6: Follows Typology of High Priest on the Day of Atonement & His Appearing 'a Second Time'**

The fall of Jerusalem and demise of the Old Covenant Temple system was no localized judgment, as some suggest, just as the Cross was no localized event -- and yet fewer people knew of it than did about the destruction of

Jerusalem. Jesus' coming in judgment in 70 A.D. was also His appearing "a second time apart from sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28). If it wasn't, this "non-occurrence" creates some major problems.

Curiously, the Bible records that Jesus had come and appeared MANY TIMES following both His resurrection and ascension. Then what did this phrase appearing "a second time" mean? To understand this choice of terminology, we must refer to the typology of the Jewish high priest. The high priesthood was centralmost to Israel's existence. It was their very connection with God. Once each year on the Day of Atonement [the 6th Jewish feast as prescribed by the Law], the high priest would perform his most sacred duty. He'd put on his finery, make an animal sacrifice, put its blood in a bowl, tie a rope around his leg, appear before the gathered crowd in front of the Tabernacle [later the Temple], enter into the Holy of Holies, sprinkle the blood on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant, and then re-appear "a second time" to bless the awaiting congregation. The time he was inside the Holy of Holies was a fearful time for the assembled crowd. But his re-appearance alive, "a second time," was the most-awaited and rejoiceful part of this whole event. It revealed that the sacrifice had been accepted by God and Israel's sins were forgiven for another year.

Jesus Christ, as our new and superior High Priest of the New Covenant (Heb. 7-10), followed and fulfilled this typology, perfectly (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). After Jesus ascended to the Father, He entered the true Holy of Holies and offered up the Perfect Sacrifice of His spilled blood. But never was atonement considered as completed with just the slaying of the sacrifice. Neither was it finished by entering into the Holy of Holies. In order for Jesus to fulfill the high priest typology, He also needed to fulfill the final, inseparable and essential act of atonement – to appear "a second time" to show that His Sacrifice had been accepted. If, however, this final step has yet to occur, as many traditionalists tell us, then here are a few rather problematic and inescapable consequences:

1. 1st-century believers watched, waited and eagerly expected in vain (1 Pet. 1:5-9; 2:12; Heb. 9:28; 10:25; Lk. 21:28; Ph. 3:20; Gal. 5:5; Rm.13:11-13; 1 Cor. 1:7; Tit. 2:11-13).

2. Their and our salvation today is still incomplete. If no final proof of atonement has been manifested from heaven, we cannot know if Jesus' Sacrifice has been accepted by God, yet and...

3. We can't know for sure if our sins are fully forgiven,... if we are totally reconciled to God, ...or if we were to die tonight that we'd immediately go to heaven, yet.

In other words, all we could be sure of is that we have the promise of salvation. And, if that's all we have, then how is the New Covenant better than the Old in this important regard, if it still doesn't supply what the Old could not provide? Then how much salvation do we presently have? How much sin has Christ put away so far? Is there a split redemption? Please note that any doctrine which says Jesus must yet come back and fulfill salvation promises to Israel is saying we don't yet have redemption (1 Pet. 1:9-13; Acts 3:24; 26:6-8; Eph. 4:4). There's no way around it, if we carefully follow the typology under the Law system of Jesus' fulfillment of the high priesthood pattern on the Day of Atonement.

But the good news is, there was no 19-plus-centuries delay. God's redemptive plan was thoroughly tied to Christ's appearing "a second time." And, as our High Priest, He did just that as part of His atoning work in history. He has been "revealed from heaven" (2 Th. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7; Lk. 17:30, 31). The 6th Jewish feast of the Day of Atonement is totally fulfilled. How so? By His "coming on the clouds." The invisible nature of that particular type of coming was why a "sign" was needed and asked for by His disciples (Mt. 24:3, 30). Jesus had inseparably linked and designated the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple as this sign of His coming. And, in that event(s), He was revealed. It signaled God's acceptance of Christ's atonement (Heb. 7:25) and that the way into the Most Holy Place was now open (Heb. 9:8). Thus, Jesus has completed everything for our salvation. We no longer are "eagerly waiting."

Our problems only come when we lift this salvation process out of its "last-days"-of-the-Jewish-age context and shift it to an alleged end of a Christian age. There is no basis for removing Christ's appearing "a second time" from the end-time frame work in history of his "first" appearing (Heb. 1:2; 9:26). Remember, Jesus also inseparably linked, "Not one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law until all be fulfilled" or "everything is accomplished" (Mt. 5:18). He came to do just that (Mt. 5:17). Who of us would question that more than just a jot or tittle was ready to, was passing, and did pass away, from the Law back in the 1st Century (Heb. 8:13; 12:26-28; 1 Cor. 7:31)? The Temple, rituals, genealogies, etc. are all gone. And, "salvation is of the Jews" and their age (Jn. 4:22), not of the Gentiles and an intervening Christian age.

So, why should we still be waiting for Jesus to be revealed to His awaiting audience after almost 2,000 years have passed – again, a waiting period longer than Israel's whole existence as a covenant nation? Come on, we're talking inerrancy here. Whom will we believe, Jesus or our postponing, futurist brethren? For me, I believe Jesus. How could He be any more clear? More than one jot or one tittle has passed away and all was fulfilled and everything accomplished, just as He said. The typology is complete. We've received the goal/end/telos of our faith, the ultimate and consummated realization of the promise of the salvation of our souls (1 Pet. 1:9). But there's much more involved in this coming of the Son of Man than just judgment and salvation.

#### **Evidence #7 -- It Also Was the Lord's Parousia**

Jesus' coming "on the clouds" in 70 A.D. was also His personal, bodily return. How do we know? It's as simple as answering the question, "Where is Jesus now?" Yet, it's as complex as asking, "Why we don't see Him with our physical eyes somewhere on this earth?" And, since we don't, we deduce that Jesus could not have returned.

The simplest way to resolve this perplexity is to realize that authentic Christianity does not stand for an absent Christ – absent the entire length of the Christian age. But rather, it stands for a present Christ Who is truly and totally here with us. But at one point in history, after His ascension and during the closing period of the Jewish age ["the last days"], He did leave. His departure was the decisive factor for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:2-3, 18-19, 28; 16:7; 2 Cor. 5:8; Acts 2:16-17f). So, if He's now present and not off somewhere in some far distant place waiting to come back, then sometime between His leaving and being present with us today He had to return. Stop and think. PRESENT, ABSENT, PRESENT. There is a major inconsistency in saying Jesus is with us today and then saying He has not returned. We can not have Jesus here unless He has literally returned.

Make no mistake about it, 70 A.D. WAS THE LORD'S PROMISED AND PERSONAL RETURN! He returned as and when He said! He doesn't need to return again from anywhere at the end of the Christian age or at the demise of the material universe, as is commonly asserted. He already has. He's back. He's here in our midst (Rev. 1:13,20). Yet, this vastly under-recognized reality of the Lord's coming again and consummated return has been both the bane and the chief blind spot of Christianity for over nineteen centuries.<sup>(4)</sup> So how can we possibly say He returned when no human eye physically "saw" Him do it?

The technical word most often used in the New Testament to speak of His coming/return is the Greek word, *parousia*.<sup>(5)</sup> Although it's most often translated "coming," its primary meaning is "arrival" or "presence." And that's the full reality of what happened – the return or arrival of His real, literal, personal, bodily, living and abiding Presence with us, and not anything lesser. It's Jesus in His fullness. If this didn't happen at that time and He's present with us today, then when did His Presence return?

Jesus' "last days" return was just as much a part of His redemptive work as His dying on the cross, being resurrected, going away, sending the Holy Spirit and coming in judgment and completion of salvation. All of these redemptive acts were literal, "last days" events and united in purpose – the consummation of God's kingdom and plan of redemption. Practically speaking, our better understanding of this genuine reality of His Presence will definitely affect the way we view the present validity and viability of our faith.

Perhaps the reason Christ's *parousia* in 70 A.D. has not been given adequate attention or appreciation is due to the long history and fascination with a "Second Coming" mindset, and its preconceived and widely accepted tenet that His return must be visible.<sup>(6)</sup> Thus, for many believers, a 1st-century return of Christ is difficult, if not impossible, to fathom. But just because it was not visible doesn't make it unreal, impersonal, non-bodily, or only symbolic, or only spiritual. Nor does invisibility lessen its significant or importance. The Presence of Christ is a blessed reality!

The fact that a "sign of your coming (*parousia*)" was necessary should tip us off that the nature of this coming would not be a visible appearance of Christ Himself. [Many other comings can be either visible or invisible. But these will have to be the subject for a future paper or time.] As we've seen, that "sign of the Son of Man in heaven" (Mt. 24:30) was the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Judaic world, not a gigantic, multi-media show up in the sky. This sign signaled many things: proof of Christ's Deity and His Messiahship; a powerful witness of His glory and reigning from God's throne; the vindication of the claims of the Church as the new people of God; and it pointed to the arrival or return of His Presence. It was and still is a sign for all ages and time.

Invisibility, however, has made this particular coming of Christ hard for many to believe. But let's recall that at Pentecost there was no physical appearance of God in the coming of the Holy Spirit. And, remember, Jesus said regarding the nature of the coming of His kingdom, it "does not come visibly" (Lk. 17:20b). Then, why must He? We moderns need to wean ourselves from the idea that the Presence of Jesus must be visible. And, we must better understand His resurrected body. "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Mt. 18:20), Jesus said. Although unseen, He is truly present with them, isn't He?

Another good example of the reality of invisibility for us to consider, is how Jesus Himself interpreted the Old Testament prophecy of the coming of Elijah (Mal. 4:5-6). This fulfillment preceded the coming of Christ. But it was not fulfilled by a literal reappearance of the Old Testament prophet, Elijah, as the Jews were expecting. Instead, Jesus said John the Baptist was the predicted Elijah – the invisible spirit and power of Elijah came into and operating through John the Baptist (Lk. 1:17; Mt. 11:14; 17:10-13).

Still the most popular objection raised to the Lord's coming and return in 70 A.D. is requiring a visible criterion. And, it's typical of the materialistic view that plagues the termination-futuristic mindset. It's the same kind of physical thinking and spiritual blindness that caused the religious leaders of the 1st Century to miss Jesus. So millions around the world continue to wrestle with the so-called problem of "non-occurrence" and the sickness of deferred hope (Pr. 13:12). In what might be termed the ultimate demotion, Christ is reckoned to be off somewhere waiting to return, and, consequently, not here or somehow not here fully. How unnecessary. How erroneous. When this visibility objection is dispensed with, scripturally and historically, the whole framework of futuristic, postponement views of eschatology falls. And, rightfully so.

No, Christ did not fail to keep His time-restricted promise to return within the lifetime of His disciples. Nor, is the Christian age an extension of Christ's absence. He has, indeed, returned and received us unto Himself where He is, just as He promised – into the previously "off limits" Holy of Holies behind the veil (Heb. 6:19,20; 9:11-12; 10:19-25, 37), and into the restored Presence of the living God and Christ (Jn. 14:1-4,23). Both the Father and the Son are tabernacling [dwelling] among us forever. It's the fulfillment of the 7th Jewish Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (Heb. 9:8; Rev. 21:3;

Eze. 37:26-28). If Christianity is not the attainment of this [putting us back into the Presence of God], then what is it the attainment/fulfillment of? And, really what good is it? It's just that simple, but also that profound. The contrasting tabernacle typology in Hebrews is explicit – man's salvation from sin, Christ's preparing a place [where He is and remains] for His disciples and restoration to the Presence of God in the Holy of Holies is complete (Heb. 9:8, 9; 10:19). It's no less than the bottomline of our faith! Understanding this covenantal consummation in its proper time frame is crucial to understanding the meaning and fullness of Christianity today. It's part of our rich heritage in Christ. It was the goal of redemptive history:

"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."

Jn. 14:3 (also see Jn. 17:24)

To protract the fulfillment of this prophetic matter into a yet future time frame is to leave a vacuum and do irreparable harm to God's redemptive plan. Christ is not still preparing that place! Or, to maintain that if the Lord came in the fall of Jerusalem, then we no longer have hope of the coming of Christ, couldn't be further from the truth and the consummated reality we now are privileged to enjoy. Christ RETURNED ONCE. His ABIDING PRESENCE is forever. But His consequential, MANY MANIFESTATIONS will have to be the subject of a future paper or time. His returned Presence with us, however, is absolutely fact. How we do or don't understand it will have a direct bearing on the way we each lead our individual Christian lives.

### **What I'm Contending For**

Are you shocked, flabbergasted or even upset that Jesus might have kept His word and literally returned exactly as and when He said He would, and as and when every single New Testament reference promised and believer expected? If we are sincere about achieving a more "responsible apocalypticism" [see Appendix A], we must take seriously the seven demanding evidences this paper has presented. And, we must not evade, manipulate or try to rationalize away the Holy Spirit's 1st-century, disclosing work (John 16:13) – guiding into "all truth" was not into "non-occurrence." Likewise, we must honor the time demands, and respect and uphold the imminency issue of Scripture.

In conclusion, and to be sure there is no misunderstanding or confusion, here's what I'm contending for:

For... the faith "that was once for all delivered..." (Jude 3) in the 1st Century – not one with any portion yet to be delivered.

For... an imminent "end of all things" which was covenantal, not cosmic, and "at hand" in that same time-context and fulfillment (1 Pet. 4:7) – not still future.

For... the Lord's anointing, crucifixion, resurrection, and "coming-on-the-clouds" return which were each precisely foretold, time-specified and time-restricted by Scripture – no delays, no non-occurrences, no failures, no unmet expectations.

(refer to presenter's E.T.S. paper 3/96 -- GOD'S TRUSTWORTHINESS: The Literal, Exact, Chronological and Sequential Fulfillment of Daniel's Two Time Prophecies -- No Gaps, No Gimmicks)

For... the Holy Spirit Who did NOT obscure Christ's truth, and did NOT become the spirit of falsehood to 1st-century believers, but Who guided their expectations correctly.

For... the consummated reality of our faith which is no longer our hope but our heritage.

In other words, I'm contending for the reformation and restoration of John 16:13! Dare we make any less of it?

### **Presenter's Postscript**

"In every generation except one, the Church has wrongly proclaimed the imminency of our Lord's return. No more!" John Noe

The Bible was meant to be understood in its clear meaning. But the history of most eschatological writings and teachings throughout the Church age has tried, in essence, to explain away why Spirit-guided and expected eschatological events didn't happen and consummatory realities weren't fulfilled. We must ask, who has made the error? Whose view of the future was/is mistaken? And, who should know better, Jesus? Inspired NT writers? Or, we postponement traditionalists of today? I prefer to abide by the opening words of this song:

"Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at His word..."

Dare we undermine the plain meaning of Jesus' own words, discredit the spirit-led expectations of His disciples or deny the very clearly and emphatically defined time parameters? Dare we impugn the genuineness of biblical imminency, or conflict with the unity, harmony and consistency that 1st-century fulfillment offers? Perhaps, we'd be well-advised to follow the mantra of the literalists, "When the plain meaning makes sense, seek no other sense." If only we would do this, we wouldn't need to devise strained exegetical schemes in order to resolve what appears to be a chronological difficulty within the context of our various postponement positions (Pre-mil, Post-mil, A-mil, Historicism).

This is why I'm proposing eschatological reform [see Appendix A]. A good starting point would be the time and manner of Christ's return. This was clearly spelled out. And, He's now present in us and with us in a manner He was never present before, isn't He? This is the crux issue. Miss it, even slightly, and we're bound to be way off on other things, as well. But if you think that the Lord's return is still too hard to believe, let me remind you what should be equally if not more difficult to believe – that our 1st-century ancestors in the faith were misled by the Holy Spirit or misunderstood the Spirit's disclosing work.

To the contrary, the Lord's timely return is a most authenticating part of the beauty of our finished faith. And, sure, this realization will be devastating to the traditional concept of postponement and delay, but that should not deter us. We must face up to it, seriously and sincerely. There was no "delay" and there's no justification for one. Obviously, a thorough reassessment of other eschatological issues is now necessitated. And, rightfully so. We are called to "Test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Th. 5:21; also see Ti. 3:16), to speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11) and not add or take away from God's revealed truth (1 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 22:18, 19).

Some, no doubt, who loudly, vigorously and rightly proclaim the necessity of Bible authority, will find this call for testing to be highly emotional and maybe unacceptable. Why? Because for them, when the evidence of this paper is placed alongside long-standing tradition, the latter wins. Tradition, while mostly good, can become a god, a bondage and an agenda which demands blind compliance. In those cases, tradition's power is greater than revealed truth from Scripture, and makes "the word of God of no effect" (Mr. 7:13). In their reluctance, many of these saints of God may hope that what is being said in this paper will just go away, and by ignoring it, nobody will take it seriously. But one's commitment as a sincere believer must always be to Christ, not to tradition. And, when the evidence opposing part of our tradition is so overwhelming, so demanding, so fulfilled-to-the-letter and so documented in history, efforts to censor its hearing must not succeed.

Finally, the intent of this paper is not to hurt or to destroy, but to effect change where change is needed and initiate reform where reform is still needed. If, however, I am wrong on any aspect of what I've said, I desire correction. I sincerely beseech you to talk openly and lovingly with me. Your comments and guidance will be gratefully received and thoughtfully considered. But if what I've said is the truth of Scripture and the reality of history, I seek the reformation and restoration of John 16:13, the reformation of the Church's divisive system of eschatology and the restoration of authentic biblical faith [See Appendix A].

Will you join me?

### **FOOTNOTES**

1. Some interpreters want to make this fulfillment at Pentecost. But Jesus had just gone away and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a separately prophesied event sent in His absence. Others claim it was fulfilled at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-3). While the transfiguration was a temporary and partial glimpse of Jesus' Divine Glory granted to Peter, James and John the brother of James, it could not be the fulfillment of this verse. How would judgment and Jesus "reward every man" have taken place? And, where were "His angels" at either of those events as stated in the previous verse (Mt. 16:27)? Besides, all NT writers were looking for a yet-future but imminent coming befitting this description, as we'll see shortly. The fulfillment of this verse does not fit either of these events.

2. This is a quote from Psalm 90. It is describing the character and nature of God – His timelessness, everlastingness, changelessness, etc. It's not an encoding time formula, nor is it addressing how God thinks of time, as many have mistakenly taken this to mean.

3. Also frequently mentioned throughout the Bible, God dwelt or was present in a physical and visible cloud. This is another issue which will not be addressed in this paper, because it's an entirely different matter than what we are exploring. Here we are interested in how cloud phraseology is used in a symbolic manner and purpose, namely that of swiftness and power of literal judgment in both prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology.

4. Some postulate that He returned somehow in the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But this is not scripturally possible. Not only was the outpouring of the Spirit a separate and distinctly-prophesied event in the Old Testament, but it also was prior to many New Testament texts still anticipating Christ's coming again/return as future.

5. Mt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Th. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Th. 2:1, 8, 9; Jas. 5:7, 8; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 Jn. 2:28 – *erchomai* is sometimes used: Mt. 24:30, 48; 26:64; Mr. 13:26; 14:62; Lk. 21:27. This may indicated shared aspects of that type of coming with other types.

6. It was not until 1560 in the First Scottish Confession of Faith that an explicit declaration of a visible return is made in any of the historic creeds of the Church.

Many interpreters generally cite Jesus' comparison of His coming to "as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west" (Mt. 24:27), as proof of visibility. This, however, does not necessarily prove visibility or being "seen" everywhere over the whole world. Several aspects of this commonly assumed position require a more careful analysis:

- Lightning is associated with a localized weather system and is only seen in a specific locale.
- Lightning that flashes from "east to west" is the intra-cloud variety, not cloud-to-ground type of which we normally think. 90% of intra-cloud lightning is never seen or never directly seen. It's usually veiled and/or muted by clouds.
- This lightning is, therefore, limited in visibility. Its use by Jesus does not support a limitless or universality of visibility, whatsoever.
- Perhaps by this type of lightning, Jesus meant to symbolically illustrate the power and suddenness of His coming upon a particular people, in a specific locale; Or, the darkness of judgment thunderclouds passing over Israel; Or, that His Presence would only be indirectly "seen" or demonstrated by attending circumstances and results [sign] of the judgment that fell.

- We should understand that this imagery of lightning is a common theme and manifestation of God in power and judgment and used throughout the Scripture (see Nahum 1:3-6, for example).

## **APPENDIX A**

If we are truly sincere in our appeals for a more "responsible apocalypticism," the challenge we now face is one of reform. It will require a new way of thinking, a new perspective and a paradigm shift away from the structure of traditional eschatological positions. We must have the courage to go where it leads us, even into another Reformation. In the words of John Calvin, the 16th-century reformer:

"The Church is reformed and always reforming."

We moderns have not reached the point where reform is no longer needed in the Church. Eschatology needs to be the next area of radical reformation. It is ripe, and that time is now. But what reform will produce a "responsible apocalypticism" and how do we achieve it? Let me propose a four-step, reformational process for making headway:

**STEP #1--Acknowledging** the four false assumptions upon which the Church's present, confusing, conflicting and divisive system of eschatology is defined and built.

(See E.T.S. paper presented 11/95.)

**STEP #2 --Better understanding** the literal, exact, chronological, sequential and total fulfillment [no gaps, no gimmicks] of Daniel's two divine time prophecies – Daniel's 70 Weeks and "time of the end" [not the end of time]. "The end of all things" was indeed literally "at hand" there and then, in that 1st Century (1 Pet. 4:7).

(See E.T.S. paper presented 3/96.)

**STEP #3 --Realizing** that the source of most end-times' confusion and error is in our failure to recognize the beauty and full significance of the historical events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple in 70 A.D. In so failing, we've exchanged the heritage of the faith for a hope.

**STEP #4 --Replacing** the present system of eschatology with a solution of synthesis – keeping the strengths of the four major interpretive schools and dumping their weaknesses. This I might call the biblical reality of "established eschatology."

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