

Question Eighteen: What Will Happen When Christ Returns?*

I. The Return of Christ

- A. Numerous passages in the NT speak of the return of Jesus Christ (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 1Thess. 4:16; Heb. 9:28; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 John 3:2).
- B. Yet, other passages mention that no one knows the exact time of this return (Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:44).
- C. Our anticipation for this return should echo John's in Revelation 22:20.

II. The Timing of the Return

- A. While no one knows the exact time of the return, other passages mention that certain events will precede it:
 - 1. "The gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations" (Mark 13:10; Matt. 24:14).
 - 2. Great tribulations will occur (Mark 13:19-20).
 - 3. False christs and prophets will appear (Mark 13:22; Matt. 24:23-24)
 - 4. Storm theophany -- the sun and moon will be darkened, the stars will fall, and the heavens will be shaken (Mark 13:24-25; Matt. 24:29-30; Luke 21:25-27)
 - 5. A rebellion and the appearance of the "man of lawlessness," Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:1, 3-4)
 - 6. "All Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:25-26)
- B. These signs intensify the expectation of Christ's return (Luke 21:28).
- C. Have these signs already occurred and could Christ return at any moment?
 - 1. Some believe these events have not occurred and thus Christ cannot return at any moment. This seems to nullify the force of Christ's encouragement given in Mark 13:33).
 - 2. Others maintain that Christ could indeed come at any time, but they disagree over how these signs are fulfilled:

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- a) Some argue that the signs were fulfilled during the early years of the church and Christ could return at any moment. Yet, it is difficult to see how some of these signs have already been fulfilled (great tribulation, salvation of Israel, stars falling from the sky).
- b) Some argue that it is unlikely but still possible that these signs have been fulfilled. Thus, we may not think they have occurred, but we don't know. Therefore, we should be ready at all times for his return.
- c) Finally, others maintain that Christ's return will occur in two stages: the rapture of the church, preceding the tribulation, and his physical return to the earth, following the tribulation.

III. The Events at the Return

The most controversial passage in relation to end-time events is Revelation 20:1-6. The great controversy over this passage is due to its relation to the rest of the events of Revelation. How do the events of the "millennium" and the rest of Revelation relate to the church? Three views are found within evangelicalism:

- A. The Amillennial view – the millennium is occurring now and it will end with the return of Christ
 - 1. The events that precede Christ's return occurred early in the church's history, so Christ could return at any moment.
 - 2. The "coming to life" in Rev. 20:4 refers to the spiritual life of believers who are reigning with Christ in a spiritual manner.
 - 3. The "thousand years" refers to a very long period of time, in this case the church age, from the time of Pentecost to the return of Christ.
 - 4. Satan is bound (Rev. 20:2-3) in a spiritual sense through the spread of the Gospel (Matt. 12:28-29; Luke 10:18; Acts 28:31).
 - 5. Ultimately, there is no future millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. He will return and usher in judgment for unbelievers and life for believers.
- B. The Postmillennial view – the millennium will gradually come with Jesus returning at the end of the millennium

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1. As the church grows, society will change and function more and more in line with God's standards. This will lead to a millennial age of peace and righteousness over the entire earth.
 2. Christ will not physically reign on earth during this period, but he will spiritually rule through the influence of believers.
 3. Emphasis is placed on passages that speak of God's kingdom growing steadily (Matt. 13:31-33).
 4. Jesus will return at the end of this millennial period and bring about the events of the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the new heavens and earth.
- C. The Premillennial view – The millennium will come suddenly and begin with the actual physical coming of Jesus Christ back to this earth
1. Jesus' coming will be preceded by a time of great tribulation on this earth (Matt. 24:21-31; Revelation 6-19).
 2. At the end of this tribulation, Christ will return and physically reign on the earth for the 1,000 years mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5.
 3. Believers will be raised back to life and reign with him during this time (Rev. 20:4).
 4. Satan will be completely removed from the earth (Rev. 20:1-3).
 5. As Christ sets up his reign, many of those who remain on the earth will put their faith in Christ, but some will not, showing that evil is caused by our own sin, not just Satan. Ultimately, Satan will be released and lead a final rebellion which will be thwarted (Rev. 20:7ff.).
- D. Biblical Support for the Premillennial View
1. The easiest and most natural reading of Revelation 20 supports the premillennial view. The events described in this chapter seem to follow the natural chronology of the rest of the book.
 2. Other passages of scripture speak of Messiah/Christ physically ruling over this earth, while sin and evil are still present (Isa 65:20; Ps 72:8-14; Isa 11:2-9; Zech 14:6-21; 1 Cor 15:24; Rev 2:26-27, 12:5, and 19:15).

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3. The New Testament speaks of believers participating in the reign of Christ over this world (Rev. 2:26-7, 3:21; Luke 19:17-19; 1 Cor 6:3).

IV. The Victorious King

- A. While there does exist differences concerning the timing Christ's return, Christians still agree that Christ will ultimately defeat Satan (Rev 20:7-10).
 1. Christ will ultimately defeat Satan (Rev 20:7) and throw him into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10).
 2. The final judgment will follow this victory (Rev 20:11ff.).
 3. The new heavens and earth will occur after this final judgment (Rev 21).
- B. The response of all believers should parallel John's: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

Questions to Ponder

- What are some of the things about eschatology that all Christians should agree on? Which of those things gives you the greatest joy?
- What are some issues relating to eschatology that Christians differ on? How should Christians deal with these differences?

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