

The Works of the Messiah (Rev. 1:5-7)

Chapter 7

He is Coming

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so. Amen. (Rev. 1:7)

There is at the first, a certain simplicity to the Christian belief in the second coming of Jesus: During His first visit to earth Jesus promised that He would return "on the clouds of heaven with power and glory" (Mt. 24:30), and He exhorted His followers to, "Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Mt. 24:42); at His ascension to heaven, two angels told the disciples that, "This same Jesus ... will so come in like manner as you saw Him go to heaven" (Acts 1:11); Paul, writing to clarify and comfort the Thessalonian believers on the matter of Christ's second coming wrote,

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1Thess. 4:18-18)

For more than 2000 years, Jesus' followers have lived with the expectation of His imminent return to earth, this is their "blessed hope," a great longing in their hearts, a central tenet of faith, and a source of great comfort; this life is full of trials and tribulations, the return of Jesus will herald the end of this present age, and establish a new age of peace and righteousness on earth under His perfect reign.

In Revelation 1:7 John reminds His readers of the return of the Messiah, he presents it as a climactic point of Jesus' Messianic ministry, and he states it in simple terms, using phrases that are familiar to Christians and Jews. Once again

he is pointing us to the Messianic teachings which lie at the roots of Jesus' ministry, urging us to look deeper and to explore the significance of his statements.

While there is a profound, and acceptable, simplicity to belief in the return of Jesus, there is also for those who seek to delve deeper into the subject, great complexity and much that is hard to understand. Such complexity has led to a multitude of explanations and various doctrinal positions as Bible scholars have sought to make sense of the end-times, sometimes this has led to disputes and breaches of fellowship, sad to say, angry words have been spoken over the subject. It is not the aim here to present a definitive viewpoint on controversial aspects of the subject, nor of the time-scale or sequence of events such as the rapture and tribulation. A pre-millennial stance is assumed,¹ and it is hoped that whatever one's view regarding the timing of the rapture and other end-time events, there will be found here that which is edifying and useful. Our main aim is to see the Messianic roots of John's words in Rev. 1:7, and to understand that Jesus must fulfil certain Messianic expectations at His second coming.

Messianic Scriptures Demand the Second Coming of the Messiah

The Old Testament contains many recognised Messianic prophecies, Alfred Edersheim recorded 456 Old Testament passages that were applied Messianically in Jewish Rabbinical writings.² These Messianic Scriptures have for long presented something of a paradox to Jewish scholars because of two seemingly uncomplimentary strands. On one hand, the Messiah is presented as one who will suffer greatly and be put to death, Isaiah 53 being the most well-known passage in this respect. On the other hand, Messianic Scriptures speak of an all-victorious and righteous king, the covenantal promises made by God with David are prime examples of this (see 2Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:19-29). The rabbis solved this apparent contradiction by proposing two Messiahs, the suffering Messiah who would die they called Son of Joseph, the all conquering Messiah they called Son of David. Over the years the Son of Joseph Messiah was largely forgotten

¹ Pre-Millennialism, briefly stated, is the belief that following the return of the Messiah, and prior to the events following Rev. 20:11, He will reign from Jerusalem over a 1,000 year period of peace on earth, the saints reigning with him, and the devil being in prison (see Rev. 20).

² The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Appendix IX; available online at:<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edersheim/lifetimes.html>

and the Jews of New Testament times looked forward to the coming of the Son of David. We see this expectation played out in the gospels as the Jews wondered whether Jesus was indeed the promised Son of David (Mt. 12:23); their misunderstanding of Jesus' Messianic ministry, along with His failure to meet their expectation and so overthrow their enemies, led in a large part to their rejection of Him.

Christians readily accept the teaching that Jesus is Messiah, and understand that He must visit the earth twice: once He came to be the suffering redeemer, in the future He will come as the victorious king. Such understanding did not come easily to the Jews of Jesus' day, and when we see Peter proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah at one moment, and at the next rebuking Jesus when He speaks of His sufferings to come (Mt. 16:16-23), we are seeing the difficulty played out. It was only after Jesus' death and resurrection that the disciples began to comprehend the full significance of the Messianic scriptures, Jesus Himself explaining them (Lk. 24:25,26; 44-46). The early church, with its new understanding of Messianic prophecy and its fulfilment by Jesus, was able to take such scriptures, prove from them that the Messiah had to suffer and die, and so show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Act. 9:22; 17:3; 18:28).

Many Messianic scriptures were fulfilled with Jesus' first coming, many remain unfulfilled and thus demand that if Jesus is truly the Messiah, He must visit the earth again and so complete His Messianic ministry and fulfil the Word of God. An examination of unfulfilled Messianic scriptures reveals a number of events that are linked to the Messiah and which await His return to the earth, seven such events, here given with relevant scriptures, are:

1. Messiah's judgment of and reign over the nations:

I will declare the decree:

The Lord has said to Me,

You are My Son,

Today I have begotten You.

Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for Your inheritance,

And the ends of the earth for Your possession.

You shall break them with a rod of iron;

You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. (Ps. 2:7-9)

(See also: Isa. 13:6-16; Jer. 33:14-18)

2. Peace on the earth:

In His days the righteous shall flourish
And abundance of peace,
Until the moon is no more,
He shall have dominion from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth. (Ps. 72:7,8)

(See also: Isa. 11)

3. Acceptance of the Messiah by Israel:

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem
the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they
pierced ...
They will call on My name,
And I will answer them.
I will say, 'This is My people';
And each one will say,
'The LORD is My God.'" (Zech. 12:10-13:9)

4. Defeat of nations gathered against Israel:

Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations,
As He fights in the day of battle.
And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives ...
... And this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people
who fought against Jerusalem:
Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet ... (Zech. 14:3-12)

(See also: Joel 3:1-17)

5. Restoration and exaltation of Israel as chief of all nations:³

'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah:

'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness;

He shall execute judgment in the earth.

In those days Judah will be saved,

And Jerusalem will dwell safely. (Jer. 33:14-16)

(See also: Isa. 2:1-4; 14:1,2; 49:5,6; 60:1-22; Jer. ch's 30-33; Mic. 4:1-5:5).

6. The revealing of Messiah's glory to all nations:

The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,

And all flesh shall see it together,

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isa. 40:5)

I was watching in the night visions,

And behold, One like the Son of Man,

Coming with the clouds of heaven!

He came to the Ancient of Days,

And they brought Him near before Him.

Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,

That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. (Dan.

7:13,14)

³ Israel's restoration follows a time of severe judgment, known as Jacob's trouble and/or the Great Tribulation (Jer. 30:7; see also: Isa. 4:1-5; Zech. 13:7-9).

7. Messiah shares His dominion with the saints:⁴

... the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.

... Then the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. (Dan. 7:22-27)

Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You. (Zech. 14:5)

New Testament Revelation of the Second Coming

The apostle John was no doubt familiar with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament; as a disciple of Jesus he had listened to Jesus' teaching about the last days, and had received from Jesus, with the other apostles, understanding of the Messianic scriptures (Lk. 24:44,45). The New Testament expands and clarifies the teachings of the Old, and in a few succinct words John encapsulates much of the Biblical teaching on the second coming of Jesus the Messiah. We turn now to these words of John recorded in Rev. 1:7.

He is Coming

The Greek word used here, and throughout the New Testament is the noun *parousia*, it was a word used to describe a visit from a high official, it means 'being present', and denotes arrival and consequent presence. Paul sometimes used *parousia* in relation to a ministerial visit (e.g. 1Cor. 16:17; 2Cor. 7:7; Phil. 2:12). With reference to Jesus, it signifies that His arrival is a real and tangible event, involving His actual presence in order to accomplish specific purposes. The *parousia* means different things for different groups: for the saints, Jesus' *parousia* holds the promise of their "gathering together to Him" (2Thess. 2:1),

⁴ Daniel sees that the time of Messiah's dominion follows the time of rule by the "little horn" (Dan 7:8; 23-25). This little horn becomes a world ruler who, in the seven year period prior to Messiah's return, persecutes the saints, makes a covenant with Israel, and sets up the abomination of desolation (Dan. 7:25; 9:26,27); the New Testament knows him as the Antichrist (1Jn. 2:18), the man of sin, and son of perdition, who exalts himself above God (2Thess. 2:3,4), and as the beast of Revelation 13.

and that they will then be, "always with the Lord" (1Thess. 4:15-17); for the people of the world, it marks a time of judgment ("as in the days of Noah," Mt. 24:37); for the Antichrist it marks the time of his destruction (2Thess. 2:8). It is of interest to note that the Antichrist has his own parousia ("coming" in NKJV), which is accompanied by power, signs and lying wonders (2Thess 2:9), and is a counterfeit of the parousia of the Messiah which is accompanied by signs, power and great glory (Mt. 24:27; 30). The Antichrist, working with the power of Satan, seeks only to deceive, whereas Jesus' coming will be a revelation of truth to the world.

There are certain exhortations for the saints as they await the coming of their Lord Jesus. Only the Father knows the day and the hour (Mt. 24:36) and Jesus tells His disciples to, "Watch therefore" (Mt. 24:42), and they are to conduct themselves as "faithful and wise servants" who await the return of their absent master (Mt. 24:45-51). James exhorts patience like the farmer waiting for his crop to bear fruit, "Establish your hearts" he says, "for the coming of the Lord draws near" (Jms. 5:7,8). John encourages regard to relationship with Jesus, "abide in Him" he exhorts, "that when he appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1Jn. 2:28). The emphasis throughout, in respect to the return of Christ, is on service and conduct, speculation on the time of His return is somewhat pointless, so the disciple must always be ready, knowing He will come at an unexpected moment, Paul's exhorts similarly,

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. (1Thess. 3:12,13)

With Clouds

Jesus spoke of His arrival on the clouds, and clouds are often seen in Scripture in association with God and his judgments. Psalm 97, in what is a close proximation to Jesus' words concerning His second coming, states,

Clouds and darkness surround Him;
Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.
A fire goes before Him,

And burns up His enemies round about.
His lightnings light the world;
The earth melts and trembles.
The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD,
At the presence of the LORD of the whole earth.
The heavens declare His righteousness,
And all the peoples see His glory. (Ps. 97:2-6)

In the previous chapter we saw how the Lord at times revealed His glory in a cloud, that cloud known in Hebrew as the shekinah acted as a sign of God's presence, it also served as a covering and hid the full glory of God from human eyes. This association of the cloud with glory is apparent in sayings of Jesus regarding His second coming: "... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30); "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Mt. 25:31). In the Old Testament, God's glory was revealed at times to the nation of Israel; with Jesus first visit to earth, His glory was revealed to His disciples; when Jesus returns, His glory will be revealed to all the world.

There is a second Greek word related to the return of the Messiah, *epiphaneia*, from which comes the English word "epiphany", it means a shining forth, and was used of the appearance of a god to men. The word is used of Jesus' first appearance on earth to be our Saviour (2Tim. 1:10), and is also used concerning His second coming (2Thess. 2:8; 1Tim. 6:14; 2Tim. 4:1; Titus 3:8). The related verb, *phaino*, is used of the flashing of lightning that occurs at the coming of Jesus (Mt. 24:27) and of the light which shines in the darkness (Jn. 1:5). The second coming of Jesus will be a most remarkable event, the world will see the bright glory of His appearing, there will be no hiding of His true being.

Every Eye Will See Him

A third word used in the New Testament in relation to the second coming is *apokalypsis*, which means a revealing of something previously hidden. At the present time, the majority of the world, blinded by Satan and unbelief (2Cor. 4:4), rejects the Christian belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, the second coming will reveal Him to the world, every eye will see and acknowledge that He is Lord

(Phil. 2:10,11). This day is eagerly awaited by His disciples (1Cor. 1:7), and it will prove to be a vindication of their faith, and vengeance on their persecutors,

... it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. (2Thess. 1:6-9)

We see there is a duality in reactions to the return of Christ: For those who love Him and are eagerly looking forward to His appearing, it will be a day of fulfillment of long held hopes and desires, an end of suffering, and a day of rejoicing and exceeding joy (1Pet. 4:12). For those who have rejected Him, and led lives of wickedness, it is a day of judgment and woe, such as in the days of Noah and of Lot (Lk. 17:24-30); as it was then, so it will be again, the righteous escaped while the judgment of God wrought terrible disaster on the wicked.

Even They Who Pierced Him

This phrase has particular relevance to the Jewish nation, and is a very clear reference to Jesus death on the cross (Jn. 19:36,37), and to Zechariah's prophecy,

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes they will mourn for Him as one mourns for His only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zech. 12:10)

We have seen that there must be fulfillment of the Messianic promise of Israel's acceptance of the Messiah. The Jews erroneously expected two Messiahs, and when He appeared the first time He was rejected by them, even this was a fulfilment of prophecy (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 53). That rejection of Jesus as the Messiah brought God's judgment upon Israel in the form of blindness and

hardness of heart (Acts 28:25-28), and a spirit of stupor (Rom. 11:8), so that they cannot understand. This blindness is temporary, and covers a period of time during which the Gentiles are given opportunity to receive Jesus as their Saviour. Paul writes of a time to come when the "fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25, see Lk. 21:24; Mt. 24:14), at which point, "all Israel will be saved," and the "Deliverer will turn ungodliness away from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26). Zechariah shows that day will come after a terrible time of tribulation, when the nations war against Israel and two-thirds of the Jewish population has died, then the remaining Jews will call on the name of the Lord, He will return (see Mt. 23:37-39), defeat the nations ranged against them, and establish Jerusalem as the seat of His rule and centre of worship (Zech. 13:7-14:21).

All the Tribes of the Earth Will Mourn Because of Him

With this statement, John's thought moves from that of Israel's circumstances at the return of the Messiah, to that of the gentile nations. John is making an obvious link with the mourning of the tribes of the earth and prophecies concerning the expected day of the Lord, and John further links that day with the second coming of the Messiah. The day of the Lord is presented in Scripture as a time of God's judgment on wickedness, and is often known as the day of wrath (Job 21:30; Isa. 13:9; Ezk. 7:19; Zeph. 1:15); for the wicked and unbelieving it is a time of mourning, woe and terror. It has relevance both for Israel and for the gentile nations, though the outcomes are somewhat different. Concerning Israel, following judgment, there will be repentance and acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah. For the Gentile nations, the culmination will be destruction of their armies at Armageddon, and the annihilation of some nations, followed by imposition of the millennial rule of Jesus (Zech. 14:3; 16; Rev. 19:11-20:6). These two outcomes are clearly portrayed in Obadiah's prophecy, where, of the gentile nations he writes,

For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near;
As you have done, it shall be done to you;
Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.
For as you drank on my holy mountain,
So shall all the nations drink continually;
Yes they shall drink and swallow,
And they shall be as though they never had been. (Ob. 15,16)

While of Israel, he writes,

But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness;
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.
The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
And the house of Joseph a flame . . . (Ob. 17,18)

The New Testament contains similar themes as the Old when speaking of the day of the Lord, and while it is again portrayed as a day of woe for the wicked, it is also a day of rejoicing, vindication and redemption of the saints (2Thess. 1:6-10; 2Tim. 4:8). The New Testament applies various terms to the day, such as: "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor. 1:7,8); "the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:6); "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5); "the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30); "the day of visitation" (1Pet. 2:12); the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men (2Pet. 3:7); "the day of God" (2Pet. 3:12), etc. The second coming of Jesus is closely linked with this day, and so for the believer there is a great sense of expectation and longing for that day to come. The believer is exhorted many times to be in preparation for the day, first by the Lord Jesus who encouraged watchfulness (Mt. 24:42) and faithful service (Mt. 24:46-51), and by the New Testament writers who exhorted holy conduct and readiness (1Cor. 1:7,8; 2Pet. 3:11,12).

The New Testament emphasises the unexpectedness of the day of the Lord, Jesus teaching that, "of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Mt. 24:36), and while no one knows the time, there are signs that indicate the day is near: a great earthquake, the sun becomes black, the moon becomes like blood, the stars fall from the sky, the sky recedes like a scroll, mountains and islands move out of their place (Mt. 24:29-31; Rev. 6:12-14). Matthew and John make very similar observations, Matthew recording the teaching of Jesus that after these events,

The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Mt. 24:30)

And John writes that,

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Rev. 6:15-17)

Paul gives further indication of conditions preceding the day of the Lord in his letters to Timothy. First that there will be an apostasy from the faith, as some give "heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1Tim. 4:1; see Mt. 24:23,24), and second he points to moral collapse, perilous times in the last days as men descend into the most base and brutal behaviour (2Tim. 3:1-5). So there is for the alert believer warning signs of the approach of the day of the Lord, and Paul can therefore write to believers that, "you are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief" (1Thess. 5:4). For the unbeliever and the unwary however, "the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night" (1Thess. 5:2), and though they feel themselves to be at peace and in safety, "sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1Thess. 5:3). It is indeed a time when all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him.

The day of the Lord should not be thought of as a single day, but rather as a series of events including the reign of the Antichrist, judgment and restoration of Israel, the battle of Armageddon, and the glorious return of Jesus the Messiah to set up His reign on the earth, the culmination being the creation of new heavens and earth (2Pet. 3:12,13). The chief characteristic of the day is God's judgment of the wicked, both of Israel and of the gentile nations. The most sure sign given in Scripture of the beginning of the day of the Lord is the revealing of the Antichrist (2Thess. 2:3,4), then follows the seven year period of the Antichrist's rule as prophesied by Daniel (Dan. 9:27), during this period is an unprecedented time of tribulation as God pours out His wrath on the world, this is the period covered in Revelation from 6:1 to 19:21.

The Rapture. Debate centres on the timing of the rapture when the saints are gathered together to be with Christ (1Thess. 4:16,17), some believing it to be

before the revealing of the Antichrist (pre-tribulation, at Rev. 4:1), others after Antichrist's revealing but prior to the start of the day of the Lord (mid-tribulation, prior to Rev. 6:17), and some at the end of the tribulation period at the time of Jesus' return (post-tribulation, at Rev. 19:7). What is certain is that believers will not be subject to the wrath of God (1Thess. 5:9), the day of the Lord is therefore not for them one of mourning and fear.

As noted earlier, the Biblical emphasis is on the need for readiness, the Lord will return for His saints at an hour that even His disciples do not expect (Mt. 24:44); it is this note of uncertainty regarding the time of the rapture, that should engender continual watchfulness and readiness. The complexity and difficulties presented in attempting to reconcile relevant scriptures ought, it seems to this author, to strike a note of caution regarding dogmatic assertions as to the timing of the rapture.

The Messiah's second coming to earth is an absolute Biblical necessity: Messianic prophecies demand it, the words of Jesus demand it, the New Testament demands it, every true disciple of Jesus expects it, and waits eagerly for it. We do not know the day or the hour, but for sure we know it is about 2000 years nearer than when Jesus personally exhorted His followers to be ready.

He's coming soon, He's coming soon
With joy we welcome His returning;
It may be morn, it may be night or noon-
We know He's coming soon. (Thoro Harris, from the hymn, "*In these the closing days of time*")