

An Exegesis of Matthew 16:27-28

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*“For the Son of Man is **about to come** in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his words. “Assuredly, I say to you **there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.**” (Mt.16:27-28)*

I will lay forth several exegetical arguments proving that Mt. 16:27-28 cannot be divided into speaking of two different events which is the typical futurist approach. Most commentators teach verse 27 is speaking of the second coming and that in verse 28 Jesus decides to no longer address the second coming but that some of the disciples would live to witness one of three events:

1. **The transfiguration,**
2. **The ascension of Christ**
3. **Pentecost**

Before digging into a vigorous exegesis of the passage, I shall quote Westminster “divine” John Lightfoot on our text and then build upon some of his foundational comments,

“[The kingdom of God coming in power.] In Matthew, it is the Son of man coming in his kingdom. The coming of Christ in his vengeance and power to destroy the unbelieving and most wicked nation of the Jews is expressed under these forms of speech. Hence the Day of Judgment and vengeance:

- I. It is called "the great and terrible day of the Lord," Acts 2:20; 2 Thess 2:2,3.
- II. It is described as "the end of the world," Jeremiah 4:27; Matthew 24:29, &c.
- III. In that phrase, "in the last times," Isaiah 2:2; Acts 2:17; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Peter 3:3; that is, in the last times of that city and dispensation.
- IV. Thence, the beginning of the "new world," Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13.
- V. The vengeance of Christ upon that nation is described as his "coming," John 21:22; Hebrews 10:37: his "coming in the clouds," Revelation 1:7: "in glory with the angels," Matthew 24:30, &c.
- VI. It is described as the 'enthroning of Christ, and his twelve apostles judging the twelve tribes of Israel,' Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30. Hence this is the sense of the present place: Our Savior had said in the last verse of the former chapter, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels," to take punishment of that adulterous and sinful generation. And he suggests, with good reason, that that his coming in glory should be in the lifetime of some that stood there.”^[1]

A) ***"For The Son of Man Is About To Come..."***

The YLT, DARBY, WUESTNT, and WEY translations correctly translate Jesus’ return here as “about to come” or “soon to come.” These translations are accurate since this is the consistent usage of the Greek word *mello* in Matthew’s gospel let alone it’s predominate usage in the rest of the New Testament. Let’s briefly see how *mello* is used in Mathew’s gospel:

1. In (Mt. 2:13 WEY) Herod is “about to” seek to kill Jesus, and therefore Joseph and Mary need to “escape”. *Mello* here is communicating a near imminent danger not just a general danger to be aware of.
2. In (Mt. 17:12b WEY) Jesus’ point is not that He is going to suffer, but that His suffering is rapidly approaching or is “about to” take place.
3. In (In Mt.17:10-13) *mello* is used twice. The first occurrence refers to Elijah’s “about to” appearing in the future fulfilled sense. In other words, Elijah was the one the entire nation understood to be “about to come” and the text tells us that he had come in the person of John the Baptist. John is the fulfillment of the nation’s expectancy of Elijah’s “about to” or “soon to come” presence -- preparing the way for His “about to come” “great and dreadful day” of Mal.4:5-6 as previously discussed. Therefore, this is but one more piece of exegetical evidence that is in harmony with what Jesus and John the Baptist had been teaching previously Mt. 3:2-12; 4:17; 10:7, 15-23, 16:27-28. His return would be in some of their lifetimes or “The Son of Man is **about to come...**” Why? Well, since Elijah who was expected to come “soon,” had come in the person of John, Jesus’ second coming could be expected soon, for Elijah must first come, “before the great and dreadful day of the Lord” comes Mal. 4:5-6. The second occurrence of *mello* in this passage is not referring to the general fact that Jesus is going to suffer, but that He was “about to” suffer and be mistreated as John the Baptist was.
4. Here in (Mt. 17:22; 20:22 WEY) as in point #2 above, Jesus’ emphasis is not the mere fact that he is going to suffer, but that His suffering is rapidly approaching.
5. In (Mt. 24:6 WEY) “Before long” is consistent with Jesus promising that “all these things” (including the signs) would occur in the twelve’s contemporary “this generation” (Mt. 24:34). To conclude this point, Christ’s “about to” coming in verse 27 is consistent with Christ’s coming in the lifetime of “some” of the crowd listening to him in verse 28. After thousands of years of the world and Israel awaiting the Seed of the woman or the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom, the span of some of the crowd’s lifetime was a short time for them to wait and was thus “about to” happen.

B) “Verily I say unto you...”

Jesus’ phrase “verily,” “truly,” or “most assuredly I say unto you,” is used 99 times^[2] in the gospels and gives the meaning of “Absolutely,” “really,” “may it be fulfilled,” and is used as a *phrase of emphasis* to drive home a point that has gone before it. It is *never* used to introduce a new subject.^[3] Another Editor of a multi-authored book seeking to refute our position states of our text, “...verse twenty-seven looks at the establishment of the kingdom in the future, while a promise of seeing the Messiah in His glory is the thought of verse twenty-eight. **They are two separate predictions separated by the words ‘truly I say to you’**”^[4] But Mr. Ice does not produce one passage where Jesus’ phrase “Truly I say unto you” is ever used to separate the subject matter previously discussed! Since he cannot produce any evidence for his statement, his point at the very least is unscholarly and at worst, irresponsible and deceptive.

C) “Some standing here shall not taste of death” and “the kingdom of God.”

As we study Christ's teachings elsewhere in the Gospels and other related passages in the Old and New Testaments concerning:

- 1) The physical death of some of the 12 and their first century contemporaries along with
- 2) The Son of Man coming and the arrival of the kingdom of God in power, we discover Christ is addressing *a very specific and prophetic persecution coming in the Apostolic generation than just alluding to some of them dying off of because of mere old age.* The

only event in the teachings of Jesus that associates the death of some of the Apostles with the Kingdom of God is the persecution preceding his second coming Mt.10:16-23; Lk.21:16-32; Mt.23:31-36; Jn.21:19-22; Rev.6:10-11, 17; 16:6, 15; 18:5, 20. The only exception to this is the death of Judas.

Daniel's prophecy confirms Jesus' teaching. Daniel in (Dan. 2, 7, 9, 12) taught:

- 1) The kingdom would come and be established during the time of the Roman Empire.
- 2) There would be a time of persecution and death for believers during this period. The "little" horn would wage "war with the saints" and "prevail against them (thus some of them would be martyred) "Until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and (at this time) the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom." The prevailing in war with the saints from the little horn answers to the persecution and "death" of some of the Apostles and their contemporaries. Jesus made it clear that Daniel's prophecy would be fulfilled in His generation (Mt.24:15, 34; Lk.21:20-22).

Some of our opponents have made some real crucial mistakes in trying to refute us on this text. Thomas Ice makes another blunder, "A further problem with the preterist view is that our Lord said *"some of those standing here..."* It is clear that the term "some" would have to include at least two or more individuals..." "...Peter notes that "John only survived among the 12 disciples till the destruction of Jerusalem" (Ice, *Controversy*, p.88). In other words Ice is claiming that the twelve were the only audience Jesus was addressing in this text and therefore if only John was alive till the destruction of Jerusalem, then that does not meet the definition of "some" because "some" necessitates more than one. However, Mark's account clearly states, "Then he called **the crowd** to him *along with his disciples* and said:..." (Mk. 8:34 - 9:1).

When we study Christ's teaching on the "death" of some of His first century disciples in the Gospels it is always in the context of *some* of them living (while others would not) to witness His Second Coming and inheriting the Kingdom. Jesus' teaching on the death of some of His disciples and some of them living to witness a specific event is *never* addressing the transfiguration event, the ascension of Christ, or Pentecost. It is always referring to His Second Coming and to that the Old and New Testaments bear unanimous witness.

D) "...in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh..." (Mk. 8:38).

Those, whom Christ would be ashamed of at His coming, would be "**this adulterous and sinful generation**" of A.D. 30 - A.D. 70. Under the old covenant God was married to Israel Ex. 19. This marriage was both pictured as a monogamous marriage (God married to a Mother/Israel) and then after the splitting of the northern kingdom and the southern kingdoms, a polygamous marriage. The picture then becomes God taking two daughters (sisters) as His wives:

- 1) Israel (Aholah / Samaria capital of Israel) and
- 2) Judah (Aholibah / Jerusalem capital of Judah) Jer.31:31-32; Ezk. 1:1-4; 1Kings 11:9-13. These two sisters were notorious for their adultery and playing the prostitute (cf. Ezk. 1:3; Jer. 3).

Although God divorced Israel through the Assyrian captivity, He remained married to His other harlot wife Judah, from which line Jesus would come. Judah/Jerusalem was judged by the Babylonian captivity but never divorced Ezk. 23:22-45. Under the old covenant a wife caught in

adultery would be stoned and the wife of a priest would be burned. In Revelation the harlot wife of old-covenant Jerusalem was both stoned and burned! Mathison admits that Jerusalem is Babylon in Revelation. Therefore, Mt.16:27/Mrk.8:38 is describing the judgment of the “adulterous generation/wife” in an “about to be” A.D. 70 time frame. Concerning the phrase “be ashamed of” - The old covenant wife would be left without a wedding garment naked and ashamed while the His new covenant wife would be clothed in Christ’s righteousness as His new creation “house from above” thus unashamed and “further clothed” Mt.22:1-14; Rev.3:18; 19:8/2Cor.5:1-21.

E) “...There, are, certain of those here standing, who shall in nowise taste of death, until they see the kingdom of God, already come in power.” (Mrk.9:1 Rotherham Translation).

In Mark’s parallel account, some of the disciples live to see Christ’s return and kingdom coming when he uses the *perfect participle* while Matthew uses the future tense. In other words Mark is saying that some of the disciples would live to be able to **look back** on this event knowing that the coming of the Lord and His kingdom **had already come in power**. Kenneth Gentry concedes this point citing J.A Alexander: “Here “come” is “not, as the English words may seem to mean, in the act of coming (till they see it come), but actually or **already come**, the only sense that can be put upon the perfect participle here employed.”[12] Thus, His disciples were to expect its exhibition *in power*. It was not powerfully to evidence itself immediately, for many of His disciples would die before it acted in power. Yet it was to be within the lifetimes of others, for “some” standing there would witness it. This seems clearly to refer to the A.D. 70 destruction of the temple and removal of the Old Testament means of worship (cf. Heb. 12:25-28; Rev.1:1, 3, 9). This occurred as a direct result of Jesus’ prophecies (John 4:21-23; Matt.21:33ff.; 23:31-34:34).”[5]

I experientially **know** and can **see** from reading my Lord’s words and the testimony of the Scriptures themselves that the historical destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 proves without a shadow of doubt He has established His Kingdom “within” me and the rest of His Body. Jesus tells the disciples that some of them would live to “see” His coming and that the Kingdom would have already come in power to bear witness to His return. The Greek word here for “see” is *eido*. Strong’s Concordance defines *eido* as to “know how” and “perceive” as well as physical sight. Through observing with the physical senses the destruction of the outer shell of the old-covenant kingdom’s temple and City in A.D.70, “some” of Jesus’ contemporary audience would be able to “perceive” and “know how” Christ’s spiritual Kingdom had come “within” them Lk.17:20-37; Col.1:27; Jn.14:2-3, 23. This text is one of many that refutes a literal so called “rapture” or literal resurrection off the earth for the living and remaining at Christ’s return! The fact that they would remain on the earth and “know” He had come coincides with what we saw the prophet Isaiah teach of the “survivors” of the “Day of the Lord” to culminate the “last days.” Keeping Isaiah’s prophecy in mind once again, let’s turn our attention to the next exegetical point on the timing of “rewards” mentioned in our text.

F) The “reward” of Isa.40 & 62, Mt.16:27-28, & the Rev. 1-3; 20-22:12 Connection.

The “about to” coming of the Son of Man to reward the righteous and the wicked mentioned in Mt.16:27-28 is taken from the “last days” prophecy of the coming “Day of the Lord” in (Isa.2-3:10-11; Isa.40:10; Isa.62:11). Since everyone agrees that Jesus quoting Isa.3:19 in Lk.23:30 refer to the A.D. 70 judgment, and Mathison understands Christ coming to vindicate the martyrs in Rev.6:15 and give rewards in Rev. 22:12 as the A.D. 70 coming of Christ and judgment; therefore is there any reason he should not apply Mt. 16:27-28 to the same event?

<u>Mt.16:27</u>	<u>Rev.22:12</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, ” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Behold I am coming soon”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “then He shall reward every man according to his works” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be”

When Mt.16:27-28 is taken together with the book of Revelation from beginning to end, both form an inescapable A.D.70 time of fulfillment harmony. Mathison and Gentry agree with us that the audience and subject matter of the book of Revelation was written to seven historical churches in Asia Rev.1:4 who were told that they would experience the coming of the Lord, judgment, and receive rewards in an “at hand,” “about to be,” “shortly,” time frame Rev.1:1, 3, 7, 19-*mello*,” Rev.2:5, 7, 10-11, 16, 17, 25-29; Rev.3:4-5, 10-12, 18, 21; 22:6-7, 10-12, 20. **But once we get into the book of Revelation, is the “coming” of Christ associated with His judging the City and rewarding “every man” including “the dead,” (Rev. 11:13, 18) the ascension event or His second coming and imminent return in A.D. 70?**

When we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, it becomes clearer that Mt.16:27-28 is not just “a” coming/going of Christ at the ascension. Any unbiased reader of both sides of the reformed house divided can see:

- 1) the time statements point to an A.D. 70 time of fulfillment (per Matheson & Gentry), and
- 2) the coming of Christ in the book of Revelation refers to the second coming to render judgment and reward every man--the living and the dead (per most Reformed and Evangelical) commentators.

When we combine these two observations from the Reformed community we arrive at our position. Jesus’ teaching here in Mt.16:27-28 and elsewhere in the gospel of Matthew lays the foundation of what we see with the A.D. 70 imminence throughout Revelation. The Book of Revelation does not look forward to an imminent event that had already occurred – the ascension!

G) Mt. 16:27-28 and the Olivet Discourse connection.

Jesus in the Olivet discourse ties the **same subject matter** in with both Mt. 16:27 & 28. Not only is the same subject matter taken as one unit in the Olivet Discourse, but the **same time frame** for the second coming is reiterated by Christ, “This generation”:

1) Christ comes in glory Luke 9:26	1) Christ comes in glory Matthew 24:30
2) Christ comes with angels Matthew 16:27	2) Christ comes with angels Matthew 24:31
3) Christ comes in judgment	3) Christ comes in judgment

Matthew 16:27	Matthew 24:28-31; 25:31-34
4) Christ and the kingdom come in power	4) Christ and the kingdom come in power
Mark 8:38	Luke 21:27-32
5) Some of the disciples would live	5) Some of the disciples would live
Matthew 16:28	Luke 21:16-18
6) Some of the disciples would die	6) Some of the disciples would die
Matthew 16:28	Luke 21:16
7) Christ would be ashamed of the disciples generation Mark 8:38	7) All of this would occur in the disciples generation Matthew 24:34

This is a very specific historical event and is not addressing several comings of Christ at: 1) the ascension, 2) Pentecost, 3) A.D. 70, and 4) a future coming to end history.

H) **Matthew 16:27-28 and the Transfiguration event.**

Mathison states, “It has also been suggested that the “coming” of the Son of Man in 16:28 refers to the Transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:1-8). (p.176). It is also suggested by many of the same commentators that the transfiguration event is a prelude or foretaste of the Second Coming described in verse 27. So what is the relationship? In the vision, when Peter wants Moses and Elijah to remain and abide with the other disciples and Jesus, God causes the glory of Moses and Elijah to disappear. The theology of the vision is directed at the appearing and disappearing of the old-covenant order pictured in the glory of Moses and Elijah (the law and the prophets), with the emphasis on the eternal abiding glory of the new-covenant words of Christ - "here Him" (Mt. 17:5-8; cf. Mt.24:35). To seek the abiding glory and nature of the old covenant (Moses and Elijah) along with the new (the glory of Christ) was the theological error of the Judaizers and mockers of Peter’s day were making! With this in mind we can now understand Peter’s appeal to the vision as an apologetic against the mockers and false teachers of his day.

The 1Pet. 1:16-19 text is now very easy to understand. Peter is under attack by the Judaizers whom are claiming that he and the other disciples have been teaching Christians “cleverly devised stories” about the second coming (2Pet.1:16a). Peter’s apologetic against this charge is that he has two other Apostolic witnesses that will bear witness that they got their teaching of the second coming from **direct revelation** from the Father and the Son on the Mount of Transfiguration--verses 16b-18. Although Peter does not use the Greek word *metamorphoo*, he describes the Church going through a similar process--in verse 19a he says it is “...**a light shining** in a dark place, **until the Day dawns and the Morning Star rises in your hearts.**” The “day” singular is none other than the “last day” of John’s gospel and the “in that day” or last day (singular) of (Lk.17/Mt.24-25).

There are only two other places in the New Testament where this Greek word transfigured or transformed *metamorphoo* is used (Rms.12:2 & 2Cor. 3:18). Paul’s “therefore” of Rms.12:1 is linking it with his teaching on the unsearchable riches of the new-covenant “mystery” (Jew/Gentile) or salvation that he has been developing throughout and reaches its peak here in (11:15, 25-36; cf. 1Cor.2). In chapters 7-8 the issue with the old-covenant law of sin and death and the new-covenant law of the spirit, is realized within the “mind” and fleshing that out (so to speak), through a spiritual walking in the newness of this new-covenant life. In chapters 12 and on, are the practical

applications of *living out* this new-covenant salvation and life which was imminently coming at Christ's return 13:11-12. They were not to be conformed to the old-covenant world, but *be "transformed" through the new – "by the renewing of" their minds"!* This was and continues to be a "spiritual act of worship" in the new-covenant age (cf. verse 1; Jn.4:24). Paul shows how this new-covenant life is to be worked out individually within the corporate Body of Christ in verses 3-16. He then closes with words connected with Christ's new-covenant law (the true riches and meaning that were always there within the old) given on the Mount in verses 17-21/cf. Matthew 5.

The only other New Testament passage in which *metamorphoo* is used is in 2Cor. 3:18. This is likewise a very clear covenantal contrasting section within Paul's writings. The Church was in the process of "being transformed" into the likeness of Christ which was connected with the old-covenant veil being lifted from the eyes of their minds and hearts. This was obviously not a literal or biological transformation process but a spiritual and covenantal one! The old-covenant glory was "passing away" (2Cor. 3:7-11) just as the glory of Moses and Elijah had disappeared in the vision given on the mount!

Since we agree with most who understand the transfiguration event to be a foreshadowing or prefiguring of the parousia we need to ask where in the vision are the following:

- 1) the passing and burning of the planet earth,
- 2) Christ floating down on a literal cloud someday and
- 3) corpses flying out of their caskets at the end of time to be united with their spirits? The vision of the parousia in the transfiguration event gives us a theological picture/description of what the parousia was going to be all about - the passing and fulfilling of the old-covenant promises and the bringing in and establishing of the new by A.D. 70.

[1] John Lightfoot, COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM THE TALMUD AND HEBRAIC A, Vol. 2, p.422, Hendrickson pub. 1979, emphasis added.

[2] ESV English-Greek Reverse Interlinear New Testament

[3] Don Preston states in his tract, *Can You Believe Jesus Said This!?!?*, p. 11-12, "Unless "verily" is being used as an introduction and not for emphasis in Matthew 16:28/Mark 9:1 there is only one place in all the New Testament where the word is used to introduce a new subject [John 10:1]. In all other occurrences,...THE WORD IS ALWAYS USED TO EMPHASIZE A STATEMENT ABOUT A SUBJECT THAT IS ALREADY UNDER CONSIDERATION! Don was mistaken on (Jn.10:1). See my comments on (Jn.10:1) and how it applies to the previous context. Pink says, "The Pharisees' 'casting out' of the poor beggar was, in reality, the Shepherd leading him out from the barren wilderness of Judaism to the green pastures of Christianity." Christ in this text is contrasting the false shepherds of the Pharisees **just mentioned** to Himself. "**Verily" is expanding the teaching of the miracle and bringing forth a deeper meaning to what had just happened.** Arthur W. Pink, *EXPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL of JOHN*, 1Vol. unabridged version, p. 511, Zondervan pub., 1975, emphasis added. James Boice concurs, "What is the context? Well, obviously, the context is to be found in the preceding chapter in the story of the man born blind and in his mistreatment by those who were the leaders of the people. **I say this is obvious because of the absence of any transitional words at the beginning of chapter 10.** When John indicates a transition either geographically or in time he usually says something like 'after these things,' 'after this,' 'on the next day,' or 'as Jesus passed by.' Here the words of Jesus flow on immediately after his comments about the Pharisees at the end of chapter 9 and therefore are related to them." As soon as we recognize this, we recognize that the thieves and robbers must refer to the false shepherds of Israel (the Pharisees) and that the sheepfold represents Judaism. The ones who hear Christ's voice and respond to His call are those of His own who are within Israel, **of whom the man born blind is an *example*.**" James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John An Expository Commentary Five Volumes In one*, Zondervan pub.[emphasis MJS], 629-630, emphasis added.

[4] Ice, Controversy, *ibid.*, p.87, emphasis added.

[5] Gentry, *ibid.*, *Dominion*, p.215-216, emphasis added