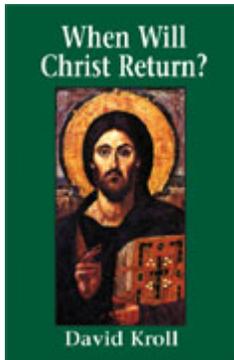


## When Will Christ Return? --an excerpt

by David A. Kroll

May 28, 2004



*Editor's note: When Jesus spoke to his disciples on the Mount of Olives, did He offer any clues for his audience or for those reading the Bible today, to know when these things were to transpire? The history of Church would have us to believe that this event is to happen at some point in either the near or distant future, but could it be that Jesus was speaking to that generation in whom He was addressing concerning these prophecies?*

*David Kroll has done his homework and offers a convincing exegesis of the scriptures to show that Jesus clearly identifies those who were part of that first century to be the recipients of the Kingdom. Furthermore, Kroll points out that the writers of the New Testament are consistently reaffirming the words of their Lord and living out their eschatology.*

*Drawing upon a thorough investigation of the scriptures and history, Kroll has put forth an easy read for understanding the great conundrum of Bible prophecy. In his book you will find a logical and concise, yet comprehensive source for both the laity and the serious student alike. Here is an excerpt from his new book, When Will Christ Return? Pick up a copy today from Presence Books for \$14.95, plus S & H.*

EVERY GENERATION SINCE THE BEGINNING of Christianity has looked forward to the return of Christ occurring in their lifetime. Yet to this very day, there has not been a visible return of Christ to planet earth. Life goes on, people by the millions live and die, and no visible return of Christ.

Interestingly enough, the first-century Church also believed that Christ would return during their lifetime. The apostles Paul, Peter, James and John, all wrote letters wherein they made statements that can be seen to reflect their belief that the return of Christ was imminent to them.

Matthew 24:30: At that time the sign of the Son of Man 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.

Is the coming of Christ on clouds to be taken literally? How is this expression used in scripture? In Isaiah 19:1, in a prophecy concerning Egypt, it is written, "See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt." In Psalm 18:9, David, in a psalm of praise to God for deliverance from his enemies, writes, "He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under His feet." In another psalm of praise, David speaks of God in this manner: "He makes the clouds His chariot and rides on the wings of the wind" (Psalm 104:3). Coming in the clouds, riding on the wings of the wind, like many other expressions concerning the activity of God in the scriptures, are simply expressions of

God's magnitude of power and presence as He intervenes in the affairs of men. These are not literal expressions of how God appears.

Matthew 24:32-34: Now learn the lesson of the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

Here Christ uses an object lesson to demonstrate to His disciples that when they see come to pass all the things He had just predicted; the wars, famines, earthquakes, the gospel going to the world, etc., His coming would be at hand. Christ said just as they would know that summer is near when they see leaves come out on a fig tree, so they would know that the end was about to occur when they see all these events taking place. Christ then dates the events He is discussing by saying that the generation He was addressing would not pass until all the things He was speaking of would come to pass. All "these things" included His return (verse 30). What generation is Christ addressing? To what time was He dating these events?

It must be remembered that Christ is addressing His disciples in the Olivet discourse. He is answering their questions about when the temple will be destroyed and His return will take place. In addressing His disciples, He says to them, "Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door." Christ then makes the statement about their generation not passing until all these things are fulfilled. The "you" Christ is addressing are his disciples. Christ is not addressing us or anyone else. It must be understood that when we read the Olivet discourse, we are reading a record of Christ addressing His disciples. When Christ tells them "when you see all these things," He is telling them that it is they who will see all these things, not others living thousands of years into the future.

A good example of how a reference to the generation being addressed at the time is contrasted with some other generation being addressed is found in the letter to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 3:7-10: So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.'

Here we see the Holy Spirit using the word "that" in reference to a generation other than the generation being addressed at the time. Christ, who also spoke by the Holy Spirit, never spoke in terms of "that" generation. Such a usage would have connoted a past or future generation depending on the context. We plainly see such usage in the passage in Hebrews quoted above. Christ never used the word "that" to modify the word generation. He always used the term "this generation" which connoted the generation He was addressing at the time.

Had I been standing in that crowd listening to Christ refer to my generation as adulterous and sinful and then proceed to say that if I am ashamed of Him He will be ashamed of me when He comes in the glory of His Father, I would not have understood that coming to be 2,000 years into the future and counting. I would have understood Christ to be referring to an event that was not very far off. When Christ addressed His disciples in the Olivet Discourse, He said, “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” All “these things” included His coming in power and glory with the holy angels.

There is no scriptural reason to believe that Christ taught two different comings in the Olivet Discourse. The prophecy contained in this discourse is one continuous description of what would occur relative to the destruction of the temple. This discourse identified the dynamics involved in that destruction. Those dynamics included the return of Christ, and events associated with that return.

The ministry of John the Baptist was a fulfillment of what Malachi had prophesied. Malachi shows this ministry preceding the coming of the Lord in judgment. Malachi associates a burning by fire with this judgment. John the Baptist associates fire with the coming judgment upon Israel. John the Baptist shows this judgment already beginning at the time of His ministry.

Matthew 3:1-12: In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. ‘I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’

This passage of scripture shows John the Baptist, addressing members of the Pharisee and Sadducee religious sects of his day. He is telling them what is happening and what is about to happen. This message was being directed to first-century Israel in anticipation of the appearing of Christ. The appearing of Christ would involve his ministry, death and resurrection, and his return in judgment. All this takes place within the generation that John the Baptist was addressing.

The scriptural evidence strongly indicates that it was the generation that was living during the time of Christ's ministry that lived to experience the events Christ prophesied. A spiritual return of Christ in judgment, through the vehicle of human armies, is not out of line with other similar events in Scriptural history. The Old Testament is full of accounts of God's coming in various ways to bring judgment upon nations. Did God physically appear in these events? No, He didn't. Instead, He appeared through human armies and other natural phenomena to accomplish His purpose.

Every disciple whose writings make up the New Testament addressed their audiences from the perspective that Christ would return during their lifetime. They believed and taught this because of what Christ taught them. The written record of Christ's teachings strongly point to a first-century return and establishment of the Kingdom. This return was not a physical return. It was a spiritual return whereby Christ facilitated His purpose through the Roman armies. That purpose was to bring judgment upon those refusing to accept Jesus Christ as Messiah and the New Covenant system that He came to establish.

There is no doubt that the death and resurrection of Christ caused the sacrificial system to become obsolete. Through His death and resurrection, Christ became our High Priest. There no longer was a need for the priestly system of the Old Covenant. For Gentiles converting to Christianity, the Christ event was confirmation enough that a new system was being established. For many Jews converting to Christianity, the Old Covenant was still felt to be of significance. This obsolete system did not pass away at the death of Christ. While it no longer held any spiritual significance before God, it nevertheless continued to function physically for another forty years. Those who continued to adhere to this system believed it still to be a viable system and necessary for a proper relationship with God. This included Christian Jews who still wanted to cling to many aspects of the old system. This misplaced adherence to an obsolete system would end only when the means to facilitate this system would be destroyed. This destruction would confirm that the new had replaced the old in its entirety.

Therefore, the establishment of the New Covenant was a gradual process that took place between the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ and His return in the destruction/judgment of A.D. 66 to 73. The Old and New Covenants co-existed during this period of time. The Old Covenant would not be wiped out until the destruction of the temple, which was the centerpiece of that covenant. There is good scriptural evidence for this position. In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul writes:

Galatians 4:21-31: Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: 'Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry

aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.' Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does the Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.' Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

This figurative application by Paul shows that the Old and the New Covenants were co-existing at the time of Paul's letter. But as the son of Hagar was cast out, so would the Old Covenant be removed. This analogy reflects the bitter struggle that was taking place between fleshly and spiritual Israel. Just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, physical Israel was persecuting spiritual Israel, which was the developing Christian Church. The whole force of Paul's writings, as well as other New Testament authors, reflects this struggle and its eventual resolution in the return of Christ to judge the Old Covenant adversaries of the New Covenant Christians. We see this ongoing battle recorded throughout the New Testament scriptures of which the following are a few examples.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16: For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

Hebrews 10:32-37: Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay.'

The conclusion to this matter is that the last days are past. The New Testament last days were a specific time frame relating to the transition from the Old to the New Covenant. This transition facilitated the movement from death unto life. This transition facilitated the establishment of the spiritual Kingdom and our ability to be reconciled to God and to be given eternal life. As Paul said, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). Paul said that the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. The death and resurrection of Christ provide for the forgiveness of sin and thus facilitate the removal of death. The victory over death has been accomplished through the death, resurrection and return of Christ. The return of Christ is as critical to this process as His death and resurrection. The scriptures clearly show that the victory over death was not complete until the complete removal of the Old Covenant system. This didn't happen

until the destruction of the temple and the judgment upon Israel.

Order this book today from Presence Books, [click here](#).

*David Kroll has taught the Bible as an ordained Christian minister in Milwaukee for the past fifteen years. He and his wife Barbara have three children and five grandchildren. He is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and sociology.*