

The Return of Christ: What will happen when Christ returns?

Eschatology – The study of the last things, which comes from the Greek word eschatos which means “last”

When and How?

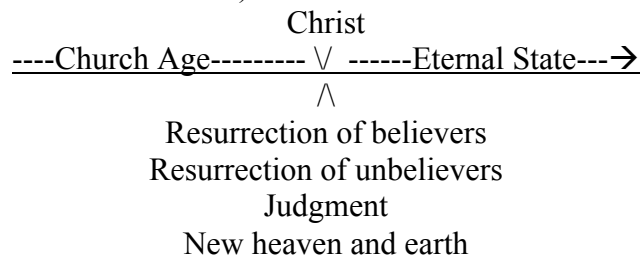
- According to scripture, Jesus’ return will be a physical and visible body
 - Acts 1:11 – “...and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’”
 - 1 Thes 4:16 – “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”
 - Hebrews 9:20 – “...so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”
- Scriptures show/depict a very dramatic and visible return of Christ
 - Rev 1:7 – “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”
 - This passage seems too explicit to allow the idea of just a “spiritual return”
 - His appearing will not be just a mere spiritual coming to dwell within people’s hearts, but will be a personal and bodily return (1 Thes 4:16)
- We don’t know when Christ will return
 - Several passages tell of how we don’t know
 - Matt 24:44 – “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”
 - Mark 13:32-33 – “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.”
 - Practical note is that anyone who claims they know the time that Christ is coming back is wrong.
 - Example would be the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They made many predictions, but have been wrong.
 - When people start to believe that they know the date of Christ’s return, they begin to stop making long term commitments
 - Moreover, they are contradicting the teaching of Scripture which tells us that people will not know the time of His return.

- Could Christ come back at anytime?
- One significant area of debate is over the question of whether Christ could return at anytime.
- There are many passages that encourages us to be ready at any moment in time at an hour we will not expect
- There are also several passages that speak of certain events that will take place before Christ returns.
- This has brought up many different conclusions
 - Verses predicting a sudden and unexpected coming of Christ
 - Matt 24:42-44, 24:50, 25:13
 - Mark 13:32-37
 - Luke 12:40
 - 1 Thes 5:2
 - 2 Peter 4:7
 - Rev 22:7, 12, 20
 - If we had just these passages it would seem as if Christ could come at anytime
 - Were Jesus and the disciples (NT authors) wrong in their expectations for his return?
 - We must realize that many of the prophets often spoke in “prophetic foreshortening”
 - The prophet sees future events but not the intervening time before those events occur.
 - God also has a different perspective on time than us
 - 2 Peter 3:8-9 – “But do not overlook the fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day...”
 - Signs that must precede Christ’s return
 - The preaching of the gospel to all nations (Mar 13:10)
 - The Great Tribulation (Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:20-24)
 - False prophets working signs and wonders (Mark 13:22)
 - Signs in Heaven (Mark 13:24-25)
 - The coming of the Man of Sin and the Rebellion (2 Thes 2:1-10)
 - The “man of sin” is sometimes identified with the beast in Rev 13 and the antichrist in 1 John 2:18
 - The salvation of Israel (Romans 9 and 11)
 - Paul tells that many Jews have not trusted in Christ at that time, but states that sometime in the future a large number will come to be saved
 - Possible explanations/solutions
 - Christ could NOT come at any time
 - Depends on each person’s estimate of how long it would take for the signs to be fulfilled
 - Problem with this view:
 - It nullifies the force of Jesus’ warnings

- The sense of urgency in the expectancy of Christ's return is greatly diminished
- We don't have to be ready for Christ's return yet
- Possible Solutions:
 - Signs were given more as a warning to keep believers from going astray
 - Luke 21:28 – “Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”
 - Christ could come at any moment
 - The NT talks about two distinct returns of Christ, a “secret” coming to take Christians out of the world, and after the seven years after the tribulation, a visible/public triumphant coming.
 - It is unlikely that all the signs have been fulfilled, but possible.
 - Therefore we simply cannot be sure, but we must still be ready for Christ's return.
 - All the signs have been fulfilled, and therefore Christ could come and return at any moment

○ **The Millennium**

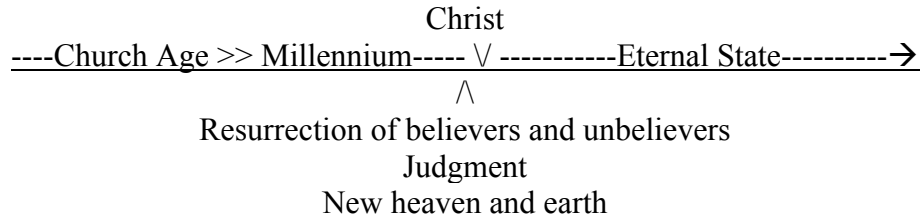
- Millennium means “one thousand years”
- The term comes from Rev 20:4-5 where certain people came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years
- Three major views – explanations
 - **Amillennialism** (No future millennium/the millennium is now, and when it ends Christ returns)



- An age where Satan's influence over the nations has been greatly reduced so that the gospel can be preached to the whole world
- Says that there is no future millennium yet to come
- People who believe in this see Rev 20 being fulfilled in this church age, the millennium is currently taking place
- according to this position, the church age will continue until the return of Christ
- When Christ returns there will be resurrection for both believers and unbelievers

- Unbelievers will be raised to face judgment, New heaven and earth will begin, and immediately after judgment the eternal state will begin
- All the end time events happen at once, immediately after Christ's return

▪ **Postmillennialism** (Christ comes after the millennium)



- As Christians continue to have a greater influence, society will begin to function more and more to God's standards -> gradually a "millennial age" of great peace and righteousness will come
- Christ will not physically come and reign on the earth, but will come about through the influence of Christians
- At the end of the period, Christ comes back like in amillennialism

▪ **Premillennialism**

- Has two subcategories

▪ **Classic Premillennialism** (Christ will come back before the millennium)

- The present church age will end and a time of great tribulation will start
- After the time of tribulation, Christ will return and establish a millennial kingdom
- Believers who have died will be raised and given a glorified body
- At the beginning of this time, Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit so that he will have no influence on the earth during the millennium (Rev 20:1-3)
- At the end of the millennium, Satan will be let loose and him along with all the unbelievers will be judged

▪ **Pretribulational Premillennialism** (Christ returns before the Millennial and before the Tribulation)

- Church age will continue until Christ returns suddenly and unexpectedly
- Christ calls his believers to him. (The dead in Christ: 1 Thes 4:16-17)
- Christ returns to heaven with the believers who have been removed from the earth

- Seven years of tribulation will begin
- At the end of the Tribulation period, Christ will come back and rule for a millennium
- After the millennium there will be a final rebellion, and Satan will be defeated
- The position allows people to insist that Christ's return can happen at any instance, and therefore does justice to the full force of passages that encourages us to be ready for Christ's return