

Growing in the Gospel



*Advent Week 1:
Understanding
the Second Coming*

*What shaped our understanding
of this cosmic event?*

Michael H. Koplitz

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Understanding the 2nd Coming

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1 – Introduction

Church folk seem to like to read and talk about the book of the Revelation. Perhaps the fascination with this book is the thought that the Lord Jesus Christ will return and will finally eradicate the problem of evil and sin in this world.

A question is who will be a part of the remnant who will survive this end of time event. There are many differing opinions and ideas as to who the remnant will be. The Hebrew Scriptures says the remnant will be those Jews who were faithful to the LORD's Torah. The Christian Scriptures, especially in Revelation, says the remnant will be the true disciples of Jesus Christ. These two ideas are the extremes with many other ideas in between.

For this study of the 2nd coming it needs to start with the prophecies found in the books of the prophets. The idea of the “Day of the LORD” is the place to start. Then the journey continues to the New Testament and especially the book of the Revelation which can be viewed as a large commentary on what the “Day of the LORD” will be. It also contains another set of warnings (the letters to the churches) about the sins and evil that the church must eradicate before Jesus' return.

Looking at the state of the church today in general, she has a long way to go to be prepared for the 2nd coming. What did Jesus expect to happen after His original disciples took over His ministry? Did Paul have the authority from Jesus to go out and create a new religion? Essentially, that is what Paul did. He went to synagogues on his travels but when the Hebrews would not follow him, he must have visited the home churches of the Mithras cult. There he found people who were willing to leave Mithras in favor of Jesus.

Jesus would be pleased that millions of people have come to know about Him and have repented for the Kingdom of God that is near. But would Jesus be happy with the bureaucracy and hierarchy that has been created in the Church of Jesus Christ?

So, when Revelation talks about the church is it the church that Jesus expected or is He speaking to the church that Paul created?

The mystical tradition of Judaism, especially in the Zohar, tells us of two Messiahs. The Messiah son of Joseph was to usher in a time of the grace and justice of God to ever person. Jesus did bring the grace and justice of God into the world. Unfortunately, many people have not accepted Him.

Messiah son of David is supposed to come after Messiah ben Joseph and He will bring the army of

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Heaven to fight that final battle with Satan over control of the Earth and the souls living thereon.

2 – The Day of the LORD - יוֹם יְהוָה

Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. (Isa. 13:6 NAU)

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. (Isa. 13:9 NAU)

"You have not gone up into the breaches, nor did you build the wall around the house of Israel to stand in the battle on the day of the LORD. (Ezek. 13:5)

"For the day is near, Even the day of the LORD is near; It will be a day of clouds, A time of *doom* for the nations (Ezek. 30:3 NAU)

Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty. (Joel 1:15 NAU)

Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, (Joel 2:1 NAU)

The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome,

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And who can endure it? (Joel 2:11 NAU)

"The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. (Joel 2:31 NAU)

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. (Joel 3:14 NAU)

Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, For what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light; (Amos 5:18 NAU)

Will not the day of the LORD *be* darkness instead of light, Even gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5:20 NAU)

"For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head. (Obad. 1:15 NAU)

Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near, For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests. (Zeph. 1:7 NAU)

Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. (Zeph. 1:14 NAU)

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"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. (Mal. 4:5 NAU)

There are fifteen references to the phrase "Day of the LORD" in the Old Testament. Destruction will occur when the day of the LORD arrives. This destruction will consist of the destruction of sinners, those who are not following the Laws of the Torah, and the physical structures that humankind has produced. Isaiah tells us that the LORD will exterminate all the sinners from the land. Of course, Isaiah is talking about the Promised Land, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

In the book of Ezekiel, the LORD tells us that the sinners will build walls around their cities to prevent the destruction of LORD. The sinners do not understand that their walls will not stop the judgment of the LORD. Also, Ezekiel tells us that there will be a cloudy sky on the Day of the LORD. The imagery could be that when clouds appear in Judea that there might be thunder and lightning. The destruction from the LORD would certainly start in the clouds and would then reign down upon the Earth.

The minor prophet Joel offers the most imagery for the Day of the LORD. When the Day of the LORD comes the people will tremble with fear. Their trembling may be because they did not heed the words

of the prophets and did not prepare themselves for the day. Those who have not repented of their sins will certainly have the most to fear.

The sun turning into darkness sounds like a total eclipse of the sun. However, when this occurs, on the Day of the LORD, it will not be a normal eclipse but rather a darkening of the sun permanently.

The prophet Amos asks why there are people who long for the day of the LORD. Amos describes this day as darkness and not light. If darkness is a metaphor for judgment and light for love, then Amos is saying that the Day of the LORD is a day of final judgment. Why would the sinners of the world desire the day of the LORD's judgment?

The prophet Obadiah says that the sinners' dealings will be returned to them. The LORD will be sending His army to destroy the evil in the world and to dispose of all the sinners.

The prophet Malachi says that the LORD will send the prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and terrible "Day of the LORD." This prophecy has become, through tradition, in Jewish and Christian theology that the return of Elijah precedes the coming of the Messiah. That is why the Christian Scriptures imply that John the Baptist was the return of Elijah. If that is true, then the "Day of the LORD" should have

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been ushered in with the birth of Jesus. Since that did not happen, then John the Baptist was not the return of Elijah.

3 – The Two Messiahs

The two Messiah tradition of Judaism leads to an understanding of the belief of the 2nd coming of Jesus. Jesus is both the Messiah son of Joseph and Messiah son of David. This prophecy about the two Messiahs comes from the book of Zechariah. The first verse is:

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zech. 9:9 NAU)

The second verse to examine is:

² For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. ³ Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. (Zech. 14:2-3 NAU)

“So, the question is, does this king who reigns over all the earth come gently, riding on a donkey in peace? Or in great wrath, ready to do battle? Is Zechariah contradicting himself? This is a big puzzle for Jewish scholars as well. But this is not the only place in the

Scriptures where we find seemingly divergent pictures of Messiah”¹

This Jewish tradition is that God will send two Messiahs. As shown in the book of Zechariah there are two Messiahs, two kings. In chapter nine the King, the Messiah, is described as the one who is humble and is endowed with salvation. Since Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem mounted on a donkey that makes Him the first of the two Messiahs.

The first Messiah was Messiah son of Joseph. His task was to start a spiritual revolution. Jesus is the Messiah son of Joseph. He told us that He came to establish the Kingdom of God/Heaven on Earth. He did not come to start an armed revolution as many of the people thought. The task of the armed revolution is placed in the hands of the second Messiah, Messiah son of David. The book of the Revelation speaks about the return of the Lord Jesus as the Messiah son of David.

In the Gospel of Matthew and Luke, Jesus’ earthly father is named Joseph. This is a compelling argument that Jesus is Messiah son of Joseph. There are some interpretations that the reason for two Messiahs is that

¹ "The Returning King: The Two Messiahs" in Zechariah." Jews for Jesus. June 06, 2017. Accessed October 08, 2017. <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v15-n05/the-returning-king-the-two-messiahs-in-zechariah/>.

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there were two Kingdoms of Israel. Messiah son of Joseph is from the tribe of Joseph, more specifically the clan of Ephraim, which was a part of the Northern Kingdom. Messiah son of David is from the Southern Kingdom since David was a King from what became the Southern Kingdom.

⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. (Matt. 1:16 NAU)

²³ When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli (Lk. 3:23 NAU)

These two Scripture verses remind us that Jesus was the son of Joseph.

4 – The Gospels and the 2nd Coming

"For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!' (Matt. 23:39 NAU)

²⁶ "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. (Mk. 13:26 NAU)

"I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:8 NAU)

²⁸ "You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ "Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. (Jn. 14:28-29 NAU)

From the four Gospels, Jesus tells us that one day he is going to return to us. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus tells us that He will return, and He adds a quotation from Psalm 118. This reference could be Jesus telling us something about what is going to happen when He returns. Psalm 118 is called a victory song. It speaks to the eternal righteousness of the LORD. When Jesus returns He will be victorious over the evil that is in the

world. How might that happen is not indicated in Matthew's Gospel nor in Psalm 118. The question could be raised, why did not Jesus destroy evil when he came the first time?

Using the theology of the two Messiahs, the Messiah son of Joseph, who was Jesus, was not sent to fight the battle with evil using the ways of war. Rather the Messiah son of Joseph came to introduce the Kingdom of God and to tell us that we must repent of our sins. Jesus spoke quite a bit about the apocalypse, His second coming. When Jesus returns as Messiah ben David, the time is up. It will be too late to pray for the forgiveness of sin. Since we do not know when the time will be, nor do we know when we will die, we must be vigilant and not allow any sins to remain in us that we have not asked for forgiveness.

Mark's Gospel tells us about the return of the Son of Man who returns from the clouds. The Son of Man is a reference that can be found in the book of Daniel. This direct reference to the clouds is Daniel 7:13. This chapter of Daniel talks about the judgment that will occur when the Son of Man returns. Using the Daniel imagery, the people of Jesus' time would have connected the two. The second coming of the Lord Jesus is going to be a day of judgment.

Luke's reference is a part of the parable of the unjust judge. A judge who is supposed to bring justice was

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corrupted by the society because judges were paid by the persons who brought a case before him. Therefore, the judge would rule in favor of the person who offered the most money. What happened to upholding the Laws of the LORD? Greed was more important to these types of judges. If the culture of society continues in its evil path of pulling away from the Laws of the LORD, then when the second coming occurs will there be anybody who has faith in the LORD. Faith is an action verb. When we follow the Laws of the LORD then we are demonstrating our faith. God wants to see your faith in action. If Jesus returned today would he see your faith in action?

John's Gospel is a bit convoluted in its discussion of the second coming, but it is there. Jesus tells us that He had to return to the Father, who is in Heaven. One-day Jesus will come back, and we need to trust Jesus that this will happen. As the other Gospels tell us, we must be ready for his return.

It is possible that the authors of the Gospels believed in the two Messiah tradition and that Jesus was the first Messiah and would return as the second Messiah.

5 – The Epistles and the 2nd Coming

¹¹ They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11 NAU)

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Cor. 11:26 NAU)

⁹ For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess. 1:9-10 NAU)

¹⁹ For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? (1 Thess. 2:19 NAU)

¹³ so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. (1 Thess. 3:13 NAU)

²³ Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and

soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess. 5:23 NAU)

⁸ Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; (2 Thess. 2:8 NAU)

¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time-- He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, (1 Tim. 6:14-15 NAU)

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, (Tit. 2:13 NAU)

²⁸ so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him. (Heb. 9:28 NAU)

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts,

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for the coming of the Lord is near. (Jas. 5:7-8 NAU)

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2 Pet. 1:16 NAU)

²⁸ Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. (1 Jn. 2:28 NAU)

² Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. (1 Jn. 3:2 NAU)

Most of the references to the second coming is found in Paul's letters. A theory is that Paul visited the home churches of the Mithras cult and could convince the followers of Mithras that they were worshipping the wrong god. The true God they needed to worship was Jesus of Nazareth, the true Son of God.

Throughout the history of Christianity, it is clear the faith took on some, and sometimes most, of the beliefs of the cults and religions of the area the faith moved into and "Christianized" them. Paul did this. After Paul changed a house church (Mithras worship was

held in house churches) what worship liturgy or morality codes could he leave behind. If he simply changed the house church's focus to the true God, Jesus Christ, then the people would use their Mithras worship as Jesus worship.

The Mithras cult did believe in a second coming of Mithras. When Mithras returned evil would be eliminated from the world.² This believe was not in contradiction to the tradition of the two Messiahs. The tradition of the two Messiahs does not indicate if it is the same person is returning or not, therefore using the Mithras believe of his return then the idea that Jesus is both Messiahs worked for the church.

Jesus certainly can return as Messiah son of David. This would fulfill the tradition of the two Messiahs. This demonstrates one Mithras belief that would have been easy for Paul to adjust for the house churches. Essentially, Paul took Jewish law and applied it wherever he could to change the meaning the Mithras cult and in some cases, he had to eliminate some of the practices of Mithras because they were in direct violation of the Laws of the LORD.

The main theme is that the Lord Jesus Christ will return some day and He will eliminate evil from the world. That is why people must repent of their sins

² Hammerton, J. A. "Mithras." *Illustrated Encyclopedia of World History*. New Delhi: Mitta Pub., 1992. N. pag. Print.

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now before it is too late. The sinners will be sent to Hell while the righteous will be taken into Heaven.

6 – The Book of the Revelation

¹¹ 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. (Rev. 3:11 NAU)

¹² "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. (Rev. 22:12 NAU)

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (Rev. 22:20 NAU)

It is logical that the Revelation is the last book of the Bible since it prophesizes the last days, the second coming, of Jesus Christ. Most of the imagery of the Revelation is from the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures). Approximately 90% of the Revelation is a restating of messages found in the Hebrew Scriptures with some impressive additional story telling.³

To fully understand the Revelation the reader must read several of the books of the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially Zechariah, Zephaniah,

³ This approximation is by the author.

Daniel, Joel, parts of Jeremiah, parts of Ezekiel, and parts of Isaiah. These writings give us the imagery and background that the writer of the Revelation is referring to.

The Revelation is a detailed account of what is going to happen at the 2nd coming. The beginning of the book commences with a warning to the seven churches, and to us today, about the impending second coming of the Lord Jesus. It is God giving us one last ditch effort to repent because the day of judgment, the “Day of the LORD,” is almost upon us.

Since Jesus Christ is God incarnate then His 2nd return is equivalent “Day of the LORD.” Jesus will not be voiding himself of His divinity, as in Philippians 2:1-13, but rather He will return as the LORD whom He is, and judgment will commence. All the descriptions in the books of the Prophets combined with the description in the book of the Revelation will come to pass.

7 – Thoughts

There are lay folks in the church who love to read the book of the Revelation. It is filled with such imagery and descriptive power of the Lord Jesus that they cannot put it down. There are other persons who are so terrified by the book that they will never touch it. The reformer Martin Luther did not want to include the book of the Revelation in his German translation of the Bible. His contemporaries insisted that it be included.

It is a book that concentrates on our need to repent for our sins. It is the calling that starts in the Old Testament and continues into the New Testament. We must repent now for the Kingdom of God is near.

When will it be? Only God knows when the day will occur. Therefore, we must be ready for our death or Jesus' return. We must have clean hearts and not only have repented for our sins but must also make any restitutions that are due.

Those who ignore the calling of the prophets of old, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ may one day discover that they will be lost to the Lord and will be condemned to Hell.

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The message of the second coming is clear. One last time it will be repeated here: repent now for the kingdom of God is near.

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Rev. Dr. Michael Koplitz, D.Min., Ph.D. is a teacher at Bibleinteract, the Bible Learning University and is an ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church. His desire to learn what the people in Jesus' day has led him to learning the Hebraic nature of the Bible and that the Old Testament and the New Testament complement each other. He has learned to hear and understand the Scripture in Jesus' day by removing the 1900 years of church filters and interpretation thus bringing back the First Century C.E. meaning to the Word of God. Using Ancient Bible Study Methods, which are taught at the Bible Learning University, he presents numerous commentaries in his *Discovering Biblical Treasures* series and *Growing the Gospel* series.