

## CHAPTER 12

### "On the Millennium, and the Scriptural Testimonies to the Doctrine of It"

by  
Edward Greswell

#### Part 1 Second Proposition

(Condensed and Paraphrased)

We shall now look at the second of our propositions: *a Second Advent of Jesus Christ in person at the beginning of the millennium and before his judgment at the end of the millennium.*

It may be observed that the arguments which establish that Elijah is to come *first* contribute to establish the certainty that Christ will appear in person *afterward*; for these things are connected as antecedent and consequent, or as cause and effect. Elijah is not to go before unless someone else is to follow after; and Elijah must go before because that other person is to follow after. It was so in the case of the precession of Elijah (John the Baptist) in spirit, and it will be so in the case of the precession of Elijah in person. The Lord God in the person of our Savior, Christ, actually followed after the spiritual Elijah, and the same Lord God in the person of the same Savior, Jesus Christ, must actually follow after the real Elijah.

It may appear, indeed, superfluous to prove the doctrine of a second advent of Jesus Christ, for what Christian is there who does not believe in it? Jesus came once to the world to save it, and having accomplished that objective departed again to heaven by his ascension. The question to be asked is *when* will this second advent take place and what is its purpose. Is Jesus to descend to the earth for the general judgment of mankind, as amillennarians believe, or does he come to earth before that time of judgment to inaugurate his millennial reign? The term "Second Advent" cannot refer to both.

Now both events are still future and both are matters of implicit faith. We might naturally, then, look for repeated allusions to each of them in Scripture, yet not always so defining as to show which of them in particular was meant by the term *Second Advent*.

Take for example St. John's account of what passed at the sea of Galilee when Jesus last appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. We read that Peter asked a question concerning John himself: "*But Lord, what about this man?*" Jesus answered, "*If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me*" (John 21:21,22). Here we see a distinct

allusion to some coming or advent of Jesus himself in person. But the time of it is left indefinite. However, when we read in the next verse of an expectation concerning John himself that became current among the brethren in consequence of the words of Jesus--that he was not to die but to be kept alive until the time of the coming of Christ--then surely the coming referred to is that of Jesus coming to earth at the beginning of the millennium and not at the end of the millennium for the general judgment.

If a coming of Christ before the end or consummation of all things was to be expected upon other grounds, then we can understand how such a construction of the words of Jesus to Peter might get abroad in the church, that is, the idea that John should survive to witness this coming. But this idea could not be possible if there were no coming expected except the one that should immediately be followed by the new earth at the end of the millennium (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). As far as the church knew, the new earth might be indefinitely remote; but some return of Christ in person was believed to be close at hand. With this expectation generally spread about, it might not be an outlandish idea that John especially was to be kept alive until the fulfillment of the expected event, for that would mean keeping him alive not much beyond the ordinary limit of life.

Now there is the tradition that John never died, that though he ceased to appear or to live among men he was merely translated and reserved in being somewhere until the new earth. We know, indeed, that this tradition is refuted by the testimony of John's contemporaries, who have left it on record that he both died and was buried at Ephesus. Yet the idea might obviously have been invented to save the credit of the expectation that John would live until Christ came; for as time advanced, Christ did not appear, notwithstanding the belief in the nearness of his coming.

Turning to the book of Acts, we read that just after the ascension and while the apostles were still earnestly gazing up to heaven, two angels appeared and said, "*Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*" (Acts 1:11). Here again is the same allusion to a future return of Jesus, but when and where it will be are not given. But we may be clearly certain that the promise of a return of the same Jesus who had just gone away into heaven assures us of a promised return analogous to that departure just witnessed by the apostles. For example, would the same Jesus return *after* the manner in which he had departed unless he returned in a cloud? Or since he had gone up into heaven from Mount Olivet, would not the angels' words be misleading if Jesus did not descend from heaven to Mount Olivet in particular?

This last is a significant circumstance and absolutely indispensable to the correspondence between a return and a departure which were to be exactly the counterparts of each other. I believe the mission of the angels was intended to communicate this assurance while the apostles were still upon the very spot. The apostles already had a general expectation that Jesus would return at some time, for Jesus himself had often assured them of it. They also

had a general anticipation that he would return upon clouds, for that too Jesus had told them more than once. But they could never have conceived that Mount Olivet would be the particular spot of the descent from heaven unless the angels had told them, any more than they could have expected it to be the focal point of his departure unless they had witnessed it.

Let the reader compare this supposition with the import of the following passage from Zechariah:

*And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south (Zech 14:4).*

It is not my present purpose to explain the prophecies either of the Old or New Testaments which relate to the destruction of Antichrist and the termination of the great antichristian contest. I will observe only that the above text is part of the other disclosures in reference to that subject; and it appears from this passage that when the Lord interferes at last to terminate at one blow this infidel contest, Mount Olivet is the chosen scene on which he takes his stand: "*And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.*"

Now it is at the time of the destruction of Antichrist and the outcome of the antichristian battle that the millennarian expects the second advent of Christ; and it is a tradition of the church, transmitted from a remote antiquity, that Antichrist will meet with his final overthrow on the same Mount Olivet from where Christ ascended into heaven.

If, however, the personal return of our Lord in his second advent is to the general judgment, which judgment both the advocates and the opponents of the millennium agree will be followed by the new earth, then this advent described in Zechariah certainly cannot be it, for it requires a longer continuance of the present state of things.

Now although there are a multitude of passages in the Bible that recognize as a preliminary fact some personal return of Christ, they speak of it as followed immediately by the establishment of a kingdom of some kind. This kingdom is supposed both to begin and proceed upon earth. I will give one example.

*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:19-21).*

These words are a part of the sermon given by Peter to the people in Jerusalem on the

healing of the lame man who was over forty years old. Two natural inferences may be taken from them: first, that there were still seasons of refreshment in reserve with the Lord for the benefit of the Jews in particular; and, second, that there was a future mission of the same Jesus, who had once been preached to the Jews before. But neither the seasons of refreshment could arrive nor that mission of Jesus take place without the repentance and conversion of the Jews taking place together with the fulfillment of all that God had spoken by the prophets.

Concerning our present proposition, then, the second advent of Jesus Christ is plainly foretold, and seasons of rest and refreshment for the Jews in particular will be the consequence. And neither of these things can take place without the repentance and conversion of the Jews (which we will consider more at length in the Third Proposition).

And what are these times of refreshment that the Jews should procure? A millennarian has no difficulty answering this question. They are the appointed season and duration of the millennium dispensation, a period of refreshment coming from the face of the Lord. It is a communication to his people of some portion of his own happiness: "*For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light* (Ps. 36:9). And what plausible answer could an opponent of the millennium give other than that they are seasons of rest and refreshment in heaven? But this answer will not do, for what can the repentance and conversion of the Jews have to do with the coming of seasons of rest and comfort in heaven? What times of refreshing can go forth expressly from the face of God in heaven where his presence *at all times* diffuses ineffable joy and delight, incapable of degrees of increase and not less incapable of diminution? What consistency would there be in supposing a mission of Jesus Christ again to the Jews *on earth* expressly for the purpose of ushering in the commencement of a time of rest and refreshment *in heaven*? In short, the coming of a season of rest and refreshment is doubtless intended for a world that so greatly lacks it--this world of pain, trouble, and misery. The mission of Jesus Christ is no doubt designed to usher it in upon earth.

These times of refreshing may indeed be the millennium. But even if they are not, if these times of refreshing are to be transacted upon earth, then the personal advent of Christ that precedes them is definitely not an advent at the beginning of the new earth.

*An Exposition of the Parables and of Other Parts of the Gospels*, Vol. I. Oxford: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1834. Liberty taken for paraphrasing.