

SPECIAL STUDY FIVE

WHY ETERNITY MUST FOLLOW THE SECOND ADVENT

From March 9 "Christian News"

by Wick Broomall, A.M., Th. M.

Atlanta, Georgia

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the chief point of difference among students of prophecy is the question regarding the event or events that follow the second coming of Christ. The question in its simplest form is this: Will Christ's return usher in eternity or the millennium? Those who hold to the view that eternity follows the second event are generally called amillennialists; those who teach that the millennium must follow Christ's return are usually referred to as premillennialists or dispensationalists.

The present paper addresses itself to the thesis that the second coming of Christ terminates human history and introduces eternity. If this view is the correct interpretation of the biblical data, then it logically follows that no millennial age as taught by premillennialists will come into existence when Jesus Christ returns. This vital question must be answered in the light of a careful examination of the teachings of Scripture. The objective authority of God's infallible Word must outweigh any contrary view that we may have arrived at or inherited from others.

The author of this paper is so certain that eternity follows the second coming that he feels that this question must now be taken out of the realm of debate and controversy among prophetic students. The reasons presented below will sustain this conclusion.

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The following propositions are not stated in any necessary order or importance. Nor can it be said that they are all equally conclusive. Taken together, they constitute a chain of evidence that amounts to absolute certainty.

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I. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING REGARDING "THE LAST DAYS."

This teaching mainly relates to two passages of Scripture: Acts 2:17 and Hebrews 1:1. The following points will help to clarify these and related passages:

- A. The word "last" (eschatos) indicates the last in a series. The Greek word indicates that which is final or ultimate whether in degree (Mt. 12:45; 27:64), space (Acts 1:8; 13:47), or time (Jn. 6:39-40, 44, 54; 11:24; I Pet. 1:5).
- B. In Hebrews 1:1 the present gospel age is unmistakably contrasted with the O.T. dispensation. The N.T. period is called "the last days" (more literally, "upon the last of these days." Acts 2:17 also equates the gospel age with "the last days" of Joel's prophecy (2:28-32). Peter very definitely states that the phenomenon of Pentecost is "that which hath been spoken" by Joel.
- C. However, some premillennialists, in order to avoid the implications of the passages cited above, make a distinction between "the last days" as they relate to Israel and as they relate to the Church. It is affirmed that Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:28-32) really refers to Israel's millennial blessings, not to the events of Pentecost (except by way of what is called a double fulfillment of prophecy). But there is no justification for this distinction. The N.T. plainly shows that "the last days" of O.T. prophecy (e.g., Isa. 2:2-4; Joel 2:28-32; Mic. 4:1-5) are the "days" of the present gospel age introduced by Christ.
- D. Thus it is logically worthy of our acceptance that the age begun at Pentecost and climaxed at the second coming is the last period of human history. We cannot expect another age after the second advent; the Bible knows of no such age at that time. The gospel age of grace definitely fulfills the O.T. "last days."

II. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING REGARDING THE TWO AGES. This teaching is very important in deciding the question that is before us. The details will be set forth thus:

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- A. The N.T. speaks of "this age" and "the age to come." This contrast is found in the following passages: Mt. 12:32; Mk. 10:30; Lk. 20:34-37; Eph. 1:21. In some passages "this age" is referred to without any specific contrast to "the age to come" (Lk. 16:8; Rom. 12:2; I Cor. 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; II Cor. 4:4; I Tim. 6:17; II Tim. 4:10; Tit. 2:12). Nevertheless, in all these places the period of time from creation to the second advent is undoubtedly meant; and there is an implied contrast to "the age to come." Sometimes an equivalent expression "in this time" is used to indicate a contrast to "the age to come." (Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30). Sometimes "the age to come" is referred to absolutely (Eph. 2:7; Heb. 6:5; cf. Rom. 8:18).
- B. That "the age to come" designates eternity (and not the millennium) is proved by the facts that the inhabitants of that age are: 1) resurrected ones (Lk. 20:34-36; cf. I Cor. 15:35-58; I Thess. 4:13-18); 2) incapable of marriage (Lk. 20:34-36); 3) beyond the power of death (Lk. 20:36; cf. Jn. 5:24; 11:25-26); 4) recipients of eternal life (Mt. 10:30; Lk. 18:30); 5) beneficiaries of eternal blessings (Eph. 2:7).
- C. Two facts are certain: 1) "this age" designates all of human history; 2) "the age to come" represents eternity. The unpardonable sin is described as "an eternal sin" because it cannot be forgiven either in "this age" or in "the age to come" (Mt. 12:31-32; Mk. 3:29). The conclusion from these facts is that there is no place in God's plan for an interval of time called the millennium between "this age" and "the age to come." Therefore, the premillennial view lacks biblical support.

III. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING REGARDING "THE END." This teaching is of paramount importance in arriving at the truth regarding what the Bible teaching is regarding what will follow Christ's return. The following details should be noted:

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- A. The word "end" (telos) is used in the following places to designate the terminal point of human history: Mt. 24:6, 13-14; Mk. 13:7, 13; Lk. 21:9; I Cor. 1:8; 15:24; Heb. 3:6, 14; 6:11; I Pet. 4:7. The word "consummation" (sunteleia) is used eschatologically in the following passages: Mt. 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:30; Heb. 9:26.
- B. Two of the passages cited above are worthy of special note. One of these (Heb. 9:26) definitely states that Christ's first advent was "at the end (consummation) of the ages"—which surely teaches that the gospel age of grace is the final age or period of human history. The other of these passages (I Cor. 15:23-24) certainly teaches that the second coming of Christ is co-terminous with "the end" (telos).
- C. The Parable of the Tares (Mt. 13:36-43) teaches conclusively that "the harvest is the end (consummation) of the world (age)" (13:39). All mankind is included in the division made at the time of the harvest. The Parable envisions no other harvest after the one here depicted at the terminal point of human history (cf. Rev. 14:14-20).
- D. The conclusion to which we are brought by the foregoing facts is that the return of Christ signalizes the termination of human history. It is inconceivable that there is another "end" (telos) and another "consummation" (sunteleia) after the second advent. Thus the only "end" and the only "consummation" known to the Bible is that which terminates human history at the second coming. Consequently, there is no place in biblical teaching for the view that a millennial age must follow the return of Christ.
- IV. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING REGARDING THE FINALITY OF THE PRESENT AGE OF GRACE. There is hardly any truth more evident in the N.T. than that truth that tells all mankind that God is now dealing with humanity in His final display of grace in this present age. The following points will make this truth quite clear:

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- A. The N.T. age fulfills the prophecies of the O.T. age. This is obvious from the many quotations of the O.T. found in the N.T. Christ fulfilled these prophecies completely. (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-49).
- B. The N.T. age is the exact period of time anticipated in the O.T. and for which the O.T. saints hoped (Mt. 13:17; Jn. 8:56; Acts 3:24; 26:22-23; I Pet. 1:9-12). The only age that they anticipated beyond the present age of grace is the same eternal age for which we also wait; the new earth, the New Jerusalem (Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14).
- C. The N.T. age is the final opportunity for man to be saved. Now is the day of salvation (II Cor. 6:2). Now is the time when God's longsuffering is extending to men to allow them time to be saved (II Pet. 3:9, 15).
- D. The N.T. age is the time of Satan's decisive defeat. Christ announced his defeat parabolically (Mk. 3:27), anticipatively (Lk. 10:18) and dramatically (Jn. 12:31; 16:11). This defeat is stated as a major reason for Christ's incarnation (Heb. 2:14-15; I Jn. 3:8).
- E. The N.T. age is the time when Christ is reigning from the throne of David. His kingship upon this throne was announced at His nativity (Lk. 1:32-33). He took his seat upon this throne when He sat down at God's right hand (Acts 2:29-36; Heb. 1:3; 8:1). This mediatorial reign of Christ will be terminated at the second advent. (I Cor. 15:23-28).
- F. The N.T. age is the time when the entire body of the saved will be gathered together in one body, the body of Christ, the true Israel of God (Mt. 8:11; Eph. 2:11-22; Heb. 11:39-40; cf. Gal. 6:16).
- G. The N.T. age is the time when evil will reach its final climax and when all evil forces will be finally overthrown. These evil forces head up in the Antichrist who shall arise shortly before Christ's second coming and be overthrown by His coming in glory (II Thess. 1:5-10; 2:1-12; Rev. 13:19).

All the facts presented above lead us to the obvious conclusion that there is no need of another

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period of time after the second advent to complete any of God's plans or purposes. The second coming of Christ will bring to their consummation all the purposes and plans that God has set forth in His Word as objectives to be accomplished in the span of human history. There is no place for a millennium in God's announced program.

V. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING REGARDING THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PRESENT WORLD. The basic passage here is II Peter 3. Other passages where this destruction is alluded to include the following: Mt. 5:18; 24:35; Lk. 21:33; II Thess. 1:7-8; Heb. 1:11-12. II Peter 3 is of fundamental importance in our study of eschatology. This passage of Scripture completely repudiates the view that a millennium must follow the second advent. Let us look at this passage more in detail.

- A. Peter answers the claim of the scoffers that the second coming will never take place (vs. 3-4) by pointing to the following realities: 1) God's previous destruction of the world in the time of Noah (vv. 5-7); 2) God's statement of time (v. 8); 3) God's purpose in delaying His judgment (v. 9); 4) God's final and definitive judgment in the destruction of the present world (vv. 10-12); 5) God's purpose to establish a "new earth wherein dwells righteousness" after His destruction of the present world (v. 13).
- B. It is quite obvious that Peter is giving us a succinct and simple outline of the things to come in his closing chapter. It is also quite evident that there is no place at all for a millennial age anywhere in this outline. Peter does not mention such an age before the final destruction; and it is certain that "the new earth wherein dwells righteousness" (v. 13), does not refer to the millennial age. In fact, it can be positively asserted that Peter's eschatology absolutely excludes a millennium before or after the destruction of the present world. If there is to be a millennium after the second advent, then Peter's eschatology needs some serious revision, for Peter

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knew nothing about a millennium after the second advent.

VI. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING REGARDING THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE. This is an important aspect of the subject that we are dealing with. It is one that needs renewed emphasis. The following points will bring this hope before us more clearly:

- A. In II Peter 3:13 we are instructed to "look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness." The verb "look" (*prosdokao*) is found three times in II Peter 3 (*vv.* 12, 13, 14). This verb indicates a strong expectation or hope. It is used also of those who were awaiting the arrival of Christ at His nativity and later (*Mt.* 11:3; *Lk.* 3:15; 7:19-20). It is also used of those waiting for Christ's second advent (*Mt.* 24:50; *II Pet.* 3:12, 13, 14).
- B. The anticipation indicated by the word "look" in II Peter 3:13 corresponds to what the patriarchs looked forward to in "the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (*Heb.* 11:10). It is said that these ancient worthies of the faith "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city" (*Heb.* 11:16). No one could possibly maintain that Abraham and his spiritual descendants were expecting God to bless them with an earthly kingdom wherein sin still dwells. God promised them something far better—a heavenly country, the New Jerusalem. And this hope of the patriarchs of the O.T. dispensation is still our hope in the N.T. age of grace (*Heb.* 12:22-23; 13:14).
- C. The anticipation set forth in II Peter 3:13 and in *Heb.* 11:10, 16 also corresponds to the "earnest expectation" described in *Rom.* 8:18-25. The verb "wait" (*apekdechomai*) is used three times in this passage (*vv.* 19, 23, 25). This verb expresses the waiting of creation and of believers for creation's new birth at the second advent of Christ. The same verb is used to set forth the believer's waiting for

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his Savior (Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28). Thus it can be said that all creation joins in the anticipation of that final deliverance that will come at the second advent of Christ.

- D. The passages cited above can be summed up in the statement, expressed negatively, that nowhere in the Bible is the believer urged to look forward to the establishment of a millennial kingdom upon this present earth. The saints of the O.T., as we have seen above, surely did not anticipate such a dream, nor do the N.T. saints differ from them regarding their hope. We look for a "new earth wherein dwells righteousness." And this "new earth" can only be the "heavenly country" which Abraham looked forward to (Heb. 11:10, 16). Put in a positive fashion, our hope is the "abiding city . . . which is to come" (Heb. 13:14).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of our thesis has been satisfied. Sufficient evidence has been presented in this paper to prove two points: 1) that this present age of grace is the final age in God's dealings with the human race; 2) that eternity, not a millennial age, will follow the second advent of Christ.

We must not end this paper without calling attention to the gravity and importance of the truth we have been trying to set forth. There is something more required of us than an intellectual reception of this truth. We must remember that the final destruction of this present world is delayed because God is still seeking the salvation of lost souls (II Pet. 3:9). And the impact of this truth upon our lives should be profound (II Pet. 3:11, 14-18).