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The So-Called Future Second Coming Of Jesus Christ: The Case For And Against The Teaching



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Few subjects have produced more disagreement among Christians than the coming of Jesus Christ. Most Christians agree that Jesus promised to come, but they disagree sharply about when, how, and to whom those promises applied.

† The traditional futurist position teaches that the Second Coming is still future, physical, visible, worldwide, and will occur at the end of human history. This interpretation is commonly

connected with the resurrection of the dead, final judgment, and other end-time events.

† The fulfilled perspective agrees completely that Christ promised His coming, but it challenges the assumption that the promised coming remains future to us. The central question isn't whether Jesus promised to come. The question is whether He fulfilled that promise within the time frame He and His apostles repeatedly gave.

† A fair examination must consider the strongest arguments used for a future coming and then test those arguments against the audience, historical setting, prophetic language, and explicit time statements of Scripture.

† Our authority can't be tradition, creeds, popular prophecy teachers, or even the length of time a doctrine has been taught. Scripture must interpret Scripture. (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Matthew 16:27-28

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every person according to his deeds. "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

† FOR: Futurists commonly understand verse 27 as describing the future Second Coming because Jesus speaks of coming in His Father's glory with angels and rendering judgment according to works. (Revelation 22:12)

† AGAINST: Jesus immediately placed a time limitation upon this coming. Some of the people standing in front of Him wouldn't die before seeing the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. The natural audience of "some of them that stand here" was the people physically standing before Jesus.

† Separating verse 27 from verse 28 creates a problem that the text itself doesn't create. Jesus connected His coming, kingdom, judgment, and the lifetime of some of His original hearers.

† If this coming remains future in the twenty-first century, the time statement becomes extremely difficult to explain without redefining the ordinary meaning of Jesus' words. (Matthew 10:23)

Matthew 10:23

"But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

† FOR: Futurists may argue that "till the Son of man be come" points beyond the immediate mission of the disciples to Christ's future Second Coming, with the mission to Israel continuing in some sense until He returns. (Matthew 24:14)

† AGAINST: Jesus was speaking directly to His first-century disciples about persecution they personally would experience while traveling through the cities of Israel. He told them to flee from one city to another and said they wouldn't finish going through those cities before the Son of Man came. (Matthew 10:16-23)

† The immediate audience and geographical limitation are important. Jesus specifically identified "the cities of Israel," not a worldwide mission thousands of years in the future. Earlier in the same instructions, He specifically sent these disciples to Israel. (Matthew 10:5-6)

† This provides another direct first-century time limitation on the coming of the Son of Man and agrees with Jesus' later statement that some standing before Him wouldn't die before seeing Him coming in His kingdom. (Matthew 16:27-28)

Matthew 24:30, 34

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

† FOR: Futurists point to the Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and great glory and argue that nothing comparable to this description literally occurred in AD 70. They therefore place its fulfillment at a future visible return of Christ. (Acts 1:11)

† AGAINST: Jesus didn't leave the timing undefined. He said, "This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." The phrase "all these things" includes the events He had just described.

† Cloud-coming language was already established in the Old Testament as prophetic language describing divine presence and judgment upon nations. God could be described as coming on clouds without requiring His bodily descent to the ground. (Isaiah 19:1; Psalm 18:9-12)

† The immediate context concerns Jerusalem, Judea, the temple, fleeing to the mountains, and the approaching destruction Jesus had just announced. (Matthew 23:36-38; Matthew 24:1-3)

† The fulfilled interpretation therefore takes both the prophetic imagery and Jesus' explicit first-century time statement seriously.

Matthew 26:63-64

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I place You under oath by the living God, to tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man

sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

† FOR: Futurists understand Jesus' statement about "coming on the clouds of heaven" as a reference to His future visible Second Coming. They connect this language with other passages describing Christ coming with clouds, power, and glory. (Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:11)

† AGAINST: Jesus spoke directly to Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders standing before Him. He told them that they would see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven. The audience was first century, not twenty-first century. (Matthew 26:57-68)

† Jesus was drawing directly from Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming with the clouds to the Ancient of Days to receive dominion, glory, and a kingdom. The movement in Daniel 7 is toward the Ancient of Days, not a physical descent from heaven to earth. (Daniel 7:13-14)

† Jesus therefore announced His vindication, enthronement, and coming judgment against the leaders who condemned Him. This agrees with His warning that judgment would fall upon that generation. (Matthew 23:34-36; Matthew 24:30, 34)

Luke 21:20-22, 27, 32

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place.

† FOR: Futurists often interpret the Son of Man coming in a cloud as a future personal return because similar language is associated with Christ's ascension and promised coming. (Acts 1:9-11)

† AGAINST: Luke identifies the historical setting with unusual clarity. Jesus said His disciples would see Jerusalem surrounded by armies and instructed those in Judea to flee.

† Jesus called these "days of vengeance" and said they were the period in which "all things which are written may be fulfilled." That statement places prophetic fulfillment directly within the judgment surrounding Jerusalem.

† The coming of the Son of Man appears inside that same discourse and isn't separated from Jerusalem's desolation by thousands of years.

† Jesus again closed the prophecy with the time limitation, "This generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished." Jerusalem was surrounded by Roman armies and destroyed within that generation in AD 70.

Luke 21:28, 31

But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." So you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.

† FOR: Futurists understand the approaching redemption and kingdom of God as pointing to the future Second Coming, when Christ will return and believers will experience their final redemption. (Romans 8:23; Titus 2:13)

† AGAINST: Jesus spoke directly to His first-century disciples and told them what they should do when these events began happening. Their redemption was drawing near as they personally witnessed the predicted events. (Luke 21:20-28)

† Jesus also told those same disciples that when they saw these events happening, they would know that the kingdom of God was near. The fulfillment was directly connected to events they were expected to witness. (Luke 21:29-31)

† Jesus then established the time frame by declaring that their generation wouldn't pass away until everything He had described was fulfilled. That places the approaching redemption, kingdom, and coming of the Son of Man within the first-century generation He was addressing. (Luke 21:27, 32)

Acts 1:9-11

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were watching, and a cloud took Him up, out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, then behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them, and they 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 the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

† FOR: This is one of the strongest passages used for a future bodily Second Coming. The argument is straightforward, Jesus physically ascended, the disciples watched Him depart, and the angels said He would come "in like manner."

† AGAINST: The passage says "in like manner," but it doesn't say that the event would occur thousands of years later, nor does it provide the timing of the promised coming.

† The cloud is significant because clouds repeatedly accompany divine appearances and judgment throughout Scripture. Jesus Himself had already described His coming with cloud imagery. (Matthew 24:30; Luke 21:27)

† Acts 1 therefore shouldn't be isolated from the explicit timing statements Jesus had already given concerning His coming.

† Whatever "in like manner" means, its interpretation must harmonize with passages that explicitly state when Christ's coming was near and who would live to witness its fulfillment.

John 21:22-23

Jesus said to him, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!" Therefore this account went out among the brothers, that that disciple would not die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but only, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?"

† FOR: Futurists argue that Jesus wasn't setting a time limit for His Second Coming. He was making a hypothetical statement about John, and verse 23 specifically corrects the misunderstanding that John would necessarily remain alive until Christ returned. (John 21:20-23)

† AGAINST: Although Jesus didn't promise that John would remain alive until His coming, He spoke of His coming as something that could meaningfully be discussed in relation to John's lifetime. The possibility made sense to the disciples because Christ's coming wasn't presented to them as an event thousands of years away. (Matthew 16:27-28)

† John carefully corrected the rumor that Jesus had promised he wouldn't die, but he didn't remove the connection Jesus made between His coming and John's possible survival until that event. (John 21:22-23)

† This passage isn't proof of the timing by itself, but it fits naturally with Jesus' other statements placing His coming within the lifetime of His first-century generation. (Matthew 16:27-28; Matthew 24:34)

Hebrews 9:28

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.

† FOR: This is perhaps the clearest biblical foundation for the expression "second" appearing. Futurists understand it as a promise that Jesus will physically appear at the end of history.

† AGAINST: Hebrews was written to actual first-century believers who were waiting for Him. The writer didn't say that believers thousands of years later would begin waiting for this appearance.

† The surrounding letter repeatedly describes an Old Covenant order that was becoming obsolete and was near to disappearing. (Hebrews 8:13)

† Hebrews also says Christ would come in "a very little while" and "shall not tarry." Those statements establish expectancy within the original audience's historical situation. (Hebrews 10:37)

† The question therefore isn't whether Christ would appear a second time. Scripture plainly says He would. The question is whether that appearance remains unfulfilled after the time expectations given to the original recipients.

Titus 2:11-13

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and in a godly manner in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

† FOR: This is an important passage for the futurist position because Paul plainly says believers were looking for the appearing of the glory of Jesus Christ. Futurists understand this blessed hope as the still-future visible return of Christ.

† AGAINST: Paul said that "we" were looking for this appearing. The expectation belonged first to Paul and the Christians of his

own generation, not exclusively to believers living thousands of years later. (Titus 1:4)

† This passage should therefore be interpreted alongside the numerous passages stating that Christ's coming and the approaching judgment were near to that same apostolic generation. (Romans 13:11-12; James 5:8-9; Hebrews 10:37)

† Including this passage strengthens the sermon because it doesn't avoid one of the major texts futurists use to support their position.

Hebrews 10:35-37

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.

† FOR: A futurist may argue that prophetic language sometimes speaks of future events as near from God's timeless perspective. (2 Peter 3:8)

† AGAINST: The writer was encouraging persecuted first-century Christians not to abandon their confidence because they needed endurance for "a very little while."

† Telling suffering believers that relief would come in "a very little while" loses its natural force if the intended fulfillment was actually thousands of years beyond their lifetime.

† The statement "shall not tarry" reinforces rather than weakens the nearness of the expectation.

† Biblical interpretation should begin with what these words communicated to the original recipients before applying them to later generations.

Philippians 4:5

Let your gentle spirit be known to all people. The Lord is near.

† FOR: Futurists argue that "The Lord is at hand" doesn't necessarily mean Christ's Second Coming would occur within the lifetime of the Philippian believers. They may understand it as referring to the Lord's spiritual nearness or as an encouragement for believers to remain ready for His future return. (Philippians 3:20-21)

† AGAINST: Paul wrote directly to first-century believers and told them that the Lord was near. Read alongside the other New Testament statements about Christ's approaching coming, the natural sense is one of genuine nearness to Paul's original audience. (James 5:8-9; Hebrews 10:37)

† Paul elsewhere told first-century Christians that their salvation was nearer than when they first believed and that the day was near. This shows that the apostles understood themselves to be moving toward an approaching fulfillment. (Romans 13:11-12)

† Philippians 4:5 therefore fits the consistent New Testament pattern of expectation, Christ's coming was approaching for the generation to whom the apostles were writing. (1 Peter 4:7; Revelation 1:3)

James 5:7-9

Therefore be patient, brothers and sisters, 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. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, against one another, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

† FOR: Futurists commonly interpret this as part of the church's continuing expectation of Christ's future return.

† AGAINST: James addressed his own brethren and told them to remain patient "until the coming of the Lord." He then

explained why, "the coming of the Lord is at hand."

† James strengthened the urgency further by saying that the Judge was standing right at the door. This isn't naturally the language of an event intended to remain unfulfilled for thousands of years.

† The original audience was experiencing oppression and was told to endure because approaching judgment would reverse their situation. (James 5:1-6)

† The fulfilled perspective allows "at hand" and "before the doors" to retain their ordinary meaning for the people who originally received the letter.

Romans 13:11-12

Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let's rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

† FOR: Futurists argue that Paul was encouraging Christians to live in constant readiness for Christ's future return. They understand the approaching day as the final day of salvation and judgment, which could occur at any time from the believer's perspective. (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6)

† AGAINST: Paul told his first-century readers that their salvation was now nearer than when they first believed and that the day was near. His language describes an event that had become progressively closer during their own lifetime. (Romans 13:11-12)

† Paul's argument depends on the actual passage of time. Their salvation was closer than it had been when they first believed, showing that they were moving toward an approaching fulfillment rather than an event thousands of years away.

(Hebrews 10:25)

† This agrees with the consistent New Testament expectation that the coming of the Lord, judgment, and the consummation of the Old Covenant age were approaching that first-century generation. (James 5:8-9; 1 Peter 4:7; Hebrews 10:37)

1 Peter 4:5, 7, 17

but they will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

† FOR: Futurists frequently understand judgment of the living and dead as referring to the final judgment associated with a future Second Coming.

† AGAINST: Peter didn't describe that judgment as thousands of years away. He said Christ was "ready to judge," "the end of all things is at hand," and "the time is come for judgment to begin."

† These expressions communicate an approaching crisis to Peter's first-century readers.

† The "all things" must be interpreted within the covenantal and prophetic context rather than automatically interpreted as the destruction of the physical universe. (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:26-28)

† Peter's language fits the approaching judgment that Jesus had already placed within His generation.

Revelation 1:1-3

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant

John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

† FOR: Futurists argue that much of Revelation describes events so extraordinary that they must refer to a worldwide end-time period still awaiting fulfillment.

† AGAINST: Revelation begins by telling its original readers that its events "must shortly come to pass" and that "the time is at hand."

† Those statements weren't hidden symbols. They were direct statements explaining the temporal relevance of the prophecy to its original audience.

† Revelation also ends with the same urgency, showing that the time statements frame the entire prophecy rather than appearing accidentally at its beginning. (Revelation 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20)

† A future interpretation must explain why "shortly," "at hand," and repeated promises of Christ's coming were addressed to first-century churches if their fulfillment was intended for people thousands of years later.

Revelation 22:6-7, 10, 12

And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. "And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to reward each one as his work deserves.

† FOR: Futurists often understand "quickly" as describing the

suddenness of Christ's future coming rather than the nearness of when it would occur.

† AGAINST: The surrounding statements don't simply say that Jesus would come quickly once He started coming. They say the predicted things "must shortly come to pass" and "the time is at hand."

† Daniel was commanded to seal his prophecy because its fulfillment wasn't yet near to him. John received the opposite command, "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand." (Daniel 12:4, 9)

† Jesus also connected His coming with rendering to each person according to his work, the same judgment language found in His promise that some standing before Him wouldn't die before His coming. (Matthew 16:27-28)

† The beginning and ending of Revelation therefore establish a consistent first-century expectation of fulfillment.

Revelation 1:7

Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

† FOR: Futurists frequently use the statement that every eye would see Him as proof that Revelation describes a future worldwide visible return of Jesus.

† AGAINST: The same verse specifically includes those who pierced Him. That connects the coming judgment with the generation responsible for rejecting and crucifying Christ. (Matthew 23:34-36)

† Revelation 1:7 also echoes Jesus' words concerning the tribes mourning and the Son of Man coming on the clouds, language Jesus explicitly placed within His own generation. (Matthew 24:30, 34)

† Most importantly, Revelation immediately surrounds this prophecy with declarations that the predicted events would happen soon and that the time was near. (Revelation 1:1, 3)

Revelation 22:20

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

† These are among the final words of the New Testament, and they repeat the same expectation found throughout Revelation. Jesus said He was coming quickly.

† The original churches receiving Revelation were therefore given a genuine expectation of approaching fulfillment. The statement should be read together with the declaration that the time was near. (Revelation 1:3; Revelation 22:10)

† The fulfilled perspective doesn't need to redefine "quickly" into approximately two thousand years and counting. It understands Christ's promise according to the first-century time frame repeatedly established throughout the book. (Revelation 22:6-7, 10, 12)

Historical References

† Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, Chapters 4-9, described the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple during the Roman siege of AD 70, providing an important historical witness to the catastrophe Jesus had predicted.

† Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, Chapter 5, Section 3, recorded extraordinary signs associated with the period surrounding Jerusalem's destruction, including phenomena in the sky and armies reportedly seen among the clouds. These historical reports don't establish doctrine, but they demonstrate how extraordinary the events surrounding the Jewish War were understood to be.

† Tacitus, *Histories*, Book 5, Chapter 13, also recorded unusual

signs associated with Jerusalem before its destruction, including armies appearing in the sky and supernatural warnings connected with the temple.

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapters 5-7, connected Jerusalem's destruction with the judgment that followed the rejection of Christ and recorded the tradition that believers left Jerusalem before the catastrophe.

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 5, Chapters 25-36, demonstrates that later Christians discussed future expectations concerning Christ's coming and kingdom. His writings are historically important evidence for the development and continuation of futurist interpretation, but historical writers don't override the explicit time statements of Scripture.

† History can help identify the setting and reception of biblical prophecy, but our doctrine must ultimately rest upon Scripture rather than Josephus, Tacitus, Eusebius, Irenaeus, or later church traditions.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't have to live as though Jesus failed to fulfill promises that He repeatedly said were near to His first-century followers.

† Fulfilled prophecy strengthens confidence in Christ because it means His words concerning His generation came to pass

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