

The King is coming

by: Hugo Bouter

"For the coming of the Lord is at hand."

James 5:8

Preface

In this pamphlet the author defends the truth of the imminent return of Christ for His Church against the ideas of so-called post-millennialists. How can we assent to the call of the Spirit and the bride: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:17,20), if His coming cannot be expected for a thousand years (as some are saying)?

But our Lord is near, the day is at hand. Christ is coming as the Bright and Morning Star for His Church, His bride, to receive her to Himself, and to introduce her into His Father's house with its many mansions. He does not come as the Judge for His bride, but as the Saviour of His own. This doctrine is typical of the whole New Testament.

1. The King is coming

The expectation of many Christians, so-called 'post-millennialists', is that we stand at the door of a new age. They believe in a golden age for the Church on earth before the second coming of Christ, and in a common blessing for Israel and the Church in the end time. I do not agree with these views.

The present time of spiritual decline and apostasy from the faith once delivered to the saints can be compared with the days of Eli, when the Ark of God was captured and the glory of the Lord left the people of Israel. But after these dark days following the birth of Ichabod (meaning "the glory is gone"), Samuel stepped forward as the new judge and prophet of the people. This heralded a time of blessing for Israel, a day of hope and glory. But this was closely connected with *the introduction of the king*. Samuel first anointed Saul (the king after the flesh), and then David, the man after God's own heart.

Likewise, we as Christians should be waiting for a new age, a day of hope both for Israel and the Church. But it would be wrong to think that they will be blessed together here on *earth*. It is also very important to realize that their ultimate bliss depends on Christ's return from heaven. The prophetic scene calls for the coming of the King, the true Messiah of the Jews (and this will be preceded by the coming of Antichrist, the

king after the flesh; see also chapter 6 of this booklet). After Saul's rejection, David appeared on the stage and ruled as king in splendour and majesty. In the same way Christ will return and establish His reign over His people and over all the nations of the earth. Then the glory of the Lord shall fill the earth. But the Church is Christ's *body* and His heavenly *bride*. Its future differs from that of Israel.

Therefore it is wrong to spiritualize all the prophetic promises of blessing for Israel and apply them exclusively to the Church. When we think of Christ's reign, for example, we should not merely explain it in the sense of His dominion in the hearts of those who believe in Him. Though this is true to a large extent, it is just a spiritual application. It is not the direct and literal interpretation of the prophetic Word. The Kingdom of God and of Christ has a mystery form, a hidden character in the present dispensation (Matt. 13). For the King Himself is hidden in heaven; Christ is hidden in God (Col. 3:3). He rules in a mysterious way. He has authority over His disciples by His Word and by His Spirit. True believers recognize Him as their Head and Lord.

At His appearance in glory, His personal return from heaven, all this will be quite different. Then He is going to reign directly, and publicly: "Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD" (Psa. 101:8). This could be termed the true Christocracy, but the necessary condition for it is the visible return of the King. Could this time of blessing be realized *without* His return, *without* His personal presence? Could we rule without the King, who alone is worthy to receive the power and the glory? To me this seems impossible on the basis of the Scriptures.

2. The Kingdom of peace

Incidentally, the expectation of Christ's millennial Kingdom has very little or nothing to do with Jewish fables, as some claim. The point at issue is a different *interpretation* of Scripture, mostly of the prophetic Books of the Old Testament. Admittedly, there have also been reprehensible forms of millenarianism

(revolutionary movements seeking to establish God's Kingdom here and now).

But what pre-millennialism¹ supports on the basis of Scripture has nothing to do with all sorts of daydreams, though for this earth there will certainly come a time of (hitherto) unknown blessing. We see a future time of blessing for:

- (a) God's earthly people, the (converted) nation of the Jews; they will be reunited with the ten tribes and be put under the authority of one King (Ezek. 37);
- (b) the Church, which has a heavenly origin and destination; it will reign with Christ from heaven during the Kingdom of peace; it is the New Jerusalem, the heavenly capital of the coming Kingdom, and will unite heaven and earth as a kind of *Jacob's ladder* (Rev. 21);
- (c) the nations on the earth, which after the judgments of the Great Tribulation will enter the Kingdom and will be blessed together with Israel. The nations shall walk in the light of the law which shall go forth out of Zion.

3. The day is at hand

Another objection to post- and a-millennialism is the putting off of the coming of the Lord. They harm the thought of the imminent return of Christ as it is expressed in the whole New Testament. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand" (Rom. 13:11,12). The world has rejected Christ as the true Light, but dawn is breaking. The day is at hand, the Lord is near. The Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2). But prior to this He will come as the Bright and Morning Star for His Church. He is going to introduce us into His Father's house with its many mansions (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:15-18; 5:1-10; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Jas. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:5ff; 2 Pet. 1:16ff; 3:3ff; 1 John 3:3; Rev. 2:25,28; 3:11; 22:7,12,20).

The Church will be kept from "the hour of trial" (that is, the time leading up to the Great Tribulation), which shall come upon the whole world (Rev. 3:10). We shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The blessings of the Father's house are our true portion. After the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven, we will appear with Him in glory to judge the nations and to establish the Kingdom (Rev. 19-20).

¹ Pre-millennialism is the doctrine concerning the future millennial Kingdom, which will be preceded by the second coming of Christ.

Post-millennialism puts the second coming after the millennial Kingdom; they see this as a golden age for the Church and for Israel on earth.

A-millennialism completely rejects the thought of a future millennial Kingdom before the eternal state.

The expectation of the imminent return of Christ for His Church, His bride, to receive her to Himself, is typical of the whole New Testament. He does not come as a Judge for His bride, but as the Saviour of His own. Unfortunately, this expectation was already lost in the first centuries, especially after the third century when Christianity became the state religion. The established Church became a religious power on earth. It reasoned like the evil servant of Matthew 24, by thinking or even saying in public: My Lord is delaying His coming!

In this time, the time of Augustine and others, lies the origin of the spiritualization of the prophetic Word, and the appropriation of the Old Testament promises and privileges to the Church, the 'spiritual Israel'. Then the light of the heavenly hope disappeared and a dark time began in the history of the Church. This can be compared with Paul's voyage to Rome in Acts 27: the men did not listen to Paul's warnings (that is, to the inspired Word). And the ship (the Church) ended up in a storm and was driven up and down in the sea, with no light from heaven for many days. Only by listening carefully to the apostolic message is there again the hope of revival and salvation.

4. Some serious questions

In connection with the subject of the imminent return of Christ for His Church, we should consider the following questions:

- How can we assent to the call of the Spirit and the bride: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:17,20), if His coming cannot be expected for a thousand years (as some post-millennialists are saying)?
- How then can we love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8)?
- How are we to live then daily in expectation of the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:13)?
- How can we then still wait for the Son of God from heaven to deliver us from the wrath to come, i.e. the wrath of God and of the Lamb, which soon will be poured out on the earth (1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 6:16-17)?
- How can we then prepare ourselves to go out to meet Him as the Bridegroom (Matt. 25:5ff)?

Is it not obvious that the Church at large has fallen asleep, having set its mind on earthly things, so that it is no longer looking for the Lord's coming?

5. The signs of the times

We fear that so many Christians will remain sound asleep, regardless of the signs of the times, such as:

- (a) the return of Israel to its land and the rise of the other nations in the Middle East: the budding of

the 'fig-tree' (Israel) and all the trees (Luke 21:29ff);

- (b) the unification of Europe: the restoration of the Roman Empire (Dan. 2 and 7; Rev. 13 and 17);
- (c) the decline of Christendom through unbelief, Bible criticism, and immorality (2 Thess. 2; 2 Tim. 3; 2 Pet. 2 and 3; 1 John 2; Jude; Rev. 2 and 3);
- (d) the increasing number of earthquakes, wars and disasters (cf. Luke 21).

It is very clear from Luke 21 that our Lord instructed us to look at these things and to rest assured, when we see these things happening, that the Kingdom of God is near.

6. Other prophetic themes

There are more prophetic subjects to be dealt with, such as the latter rain (in connection with the future times of blessing), and the figure of Antichrist. But we will not go into detail now. The latter rain is intended especially for Israel and the nations in the end time, just like the former rain refers to the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2, and has to do with the origins of the Church (Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23,28ff; Zech. 10:1).

But this future time of blessing for Israel and the nations is inextricably bound up with the personal return of the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Prince of peace, the Son of David, the true Solomon (cf. 2 Sam. 23:3-4; Psa. 72:6). He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth (Psa. 72:6). The end, the ultimate goal of the prayers of David (cf. Psa. 72:20), is the coming of Messiah the Prince and, connected with that, the revelation of God's glory in all the earth.

Concerning Antichrist, I think that 1 John 2:18ff. makes it clear he has had many forerunners through the years. But he still has to come in the end time, after the restraining powers (the Church and the indwelling Spirit) are taken away from the earth (cf. 2 Thess. 2:6-7). In this sense I do not find it difficult — many Christians have done so in the past — to call papacy an antichristian power. But it is only a *forerunner* of the Antichrist, for John says that Antichrist denies both the Father and the Son. That implies that he will give up the fundamental confession of Christianity, the revelation of God as the Father in His Son Jesus Christ. This is worse than the errors of Rome.

The actions of the lawless one in the end time will give rise to the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ in flaming fire from heaven (2 Thess. 1:7; 2:8; Rev. 19:15,20). But let us join in with the call of the Spirit and the bride, who cry: Come, Lord Jesus!