

# **A CLOSER LOOK AT THE "AD 70 THEORY" OF LAST THINGS**

**By Olan Hicks**

The first time a preacher friend said to me that the world had ended back in AD 70, I said, "Wait a minute! I am looking out the window and it is still out there! What do you mean, it ended?" He then explained that he did not mean the literal earth, the grass, trees, rocks, and dirt. He meant the Jewish age had ended, or "world," as some translations have it in Mat. 24.

To that I had no objection. It was my understanding that we all believe that "the end" referred to in Mat. 24:14 was the end of Judaism, destruction of Jerusalem, especially the temple, in AD 70.

When the same brother said to me that the second coming of Christ had occurred at the same time, I asked, "Have you seen Him?" Again he said "No" and explained that it was not the literal Jesus in the flesh who had returned, but that He had come in a symbolic sense, visiting Jerusalem with destruction. Again I said I did not disagree with that. I wondered why this theory was being set forth as a radical change, something very different to what we had always believed. I wondered why it was being met with hostility by several brethren. I soon found out.

## **HERE IS THE PROBLEM**

I learned that not only do they say this particular "end" came (of the Jewish age) and that a symbolic "coming of Christ" occurred in that event, they also say this was the final "end," the last coming of the Lord that is to be. Jesus is never to actually return physically! That is the part that is a radical change, different to what has been a standard belief among us. Some advocates of that theory charge that because it is different to what we have always believed, we are "formatted" against it and reject it for that reason, that we have been taught to apply the prophecies differently. ("Freedom's Ring"- July. 1998, Cecil Hook. Pg. 5). That begs the question. I can tell you exactly why I reject it, because it contradicts all of the explicit

inspired statements to the contrary in the New Testament. To me that seems like a pretty good reason. This part of it is alarming because so many Bible passages graphically describe a day God has appointed in which Jesus will descend with a shout, the heavens and earth will pass away and be replaced with a new heaven and earth, the dead will be raised, and all men will be judged, not just the Jewish nation. This theory says that will not happen in actuality. The reasons why they say that are interesting and we need to look at them.

## **MY OWN IN DEPTH STUDY OF THE THEORY**

In 1982 I preached at Warren, Ohio in a weekend meeting. Max King, the chief introducer of the AD 70 theory, was serving as an elder there. He and the preacher, Terry Siverd, wanted me to consider their theory and they tried to explain it to me as much as time permitted. But it was a busy schedule and we had but little time. So I grasped as much of it as I could and promised to study it more later. They gave me a considerable amount of material, books, etc. and I agreed to reserve any decision about it until I could be reasonably sure that I was understanding what was being said. I wanted to do that because I feel strongly that drawing hasty conclusions about any brother is very wrong.

It took a long time, actually several years, to get the studying done, as fully as I wanted to, because I was very busy with things I felt were more demanding. But over a period of several years I did spend a lot of time working through it. Later, on a trip to Arkansas, Max graciously came by my home and gave me a copy of his largest book, "The Cross and the Parousia of Christ." It is a book of 759 pages plus bibliography and index. He also continued to send me his monthly publication, "The Living Presence," and Ed Stevens, also of that group, has continued to send me his publication, "Kingdom Council." A couple of other friends who accepted that theory also sent me materials they wrote. So, as you see, they supplied me with much resource material on the subject. These are friends who have been courteous to me. This composition is not intended to be an ugly expose against them nor anyone who holds that theory. I believe they are sincere people. But I also believe they are mistaken in some ways that can have serious consequences.

I tried to be as objective as I could and I studied patiently. But the farther I went in study of it the more I became convinced that serious mistakes lie at the base of it. Here are five of them. **1.** The hermeneutic they employ is not sound. **2.** There seems to be a strong pre-disposition toward the theory, a lack of objectivity. They do a lot of what I call "reaching." **3.** Their argumentation is often inconsistent. **4.** They draw conclusions and hold them even though they contradict explicit Bible statements. **5.** Many of their basic premises are purely theoretical, with absolutely no scripture statement to confirm them. I will give specific examples of this shortly, but first let's be sure we understand a couple of things.

Mark this down: They do start with scripture statements. As we have already said, the first part of what they say is correct. They read it in the text of Matthew 24. Jesus did say a "coming" of some kind would occur within that generation of time. But from there they quickly go astray and take a quantum leap into what Jesus did not say, namely that this was the only "coming" there would be. The speculation gets worse as they continue to theorize and branch out. By placing arbitrary interpretations on certain prophecies in Daniel and Revelation, they build a huge pyramid of error, starting with an untenable misuse of Matthew 24.

Advocates of this theory agree that the "coming" in AD 70 was "a symbolic coming in judgment upon Israel," not a literal coming of the Lord in person. The scripture supports that. But scripture also declares another fact, that "The hour is coming in which all who are in their graves shall hear His voice and come forth. . ." (John 5:28-29). To say that this was fulfilled when a few people were raised at the time of the crucifixion, or perhaps a few were raised later in connection with the destruction of the temple, is to dispute what the Lord said. It is an observable fact that "ALL" the dead did not come forth at that time. All people of the world were not judged at that time. To say there is no such "day" coming when all the dead will come forth, no such day as God has appointed in which He will judge the world in righteousness, is to advance a premise which challenges the integrity of Jesus in John 5:28-29, of Paul in Acts 17:31, and many others such as 1 Thess, 4:16-17 and Rev. 21:2-5.

The reader needs to understand going in that this is the part of the theory that is disputed. That an "end" occurred in AD 70 is not disputed and that a "coming" of Christ occurred in a symbolic sense is not questioned. But the idea that this was the "end" and the "coming" referred to in all the promises about the Lord's second coming, that it was the only end and second coming that will occur, flies in the face of a host of explicit Bible statements to the contrary. Cecil Hook wrote that ". . .all the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ have been fulfilled. . ." (Ibid, pg. 5). Can this be justified in the text? Advocates of this theory claim that it is the real teaching of the Bible over all, that the scriptures I refer to as explicit statements to the contrary have been misunderstood. Is there any substance to that?

### **HERMENEUTICS AND THE "IMMINENCY PASSAGES"**

One of the primary reasons they think that seems to be what they call the "imminency passages." Evidently they see these as absolute statements that the time of the return of Christ and the end of the world was very close in terms of years when they were spoken and could not have been 2,000 years or more in the future. If the apostle Peter were here I think he would say to them, "But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Pet. 3:8). Ironically, Peter, in that third chapter, was discussing this very thing, the delay in the coming of the final day and the fact that some in later times would not understand it. He explains in the next verse (9) that the reason for the delay is not that God is slack concerning these promises, but that He is "longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." So He continues to wait. But they deny that the delay exists.

This points to another mistake in the AD 70 theory, the idea that the opportunity to get into the kingdom extends beyond the final day of judgment. Jesus indicated that the opportunity to repent is extended to mankind only until that day. When once He has risen up and shut the door, those who stand without and knock and plead for admission, will not get in. (Luke 13:25). God knows that and so He continues to wait and keep the door open. But these brethren insist that the judgment day has occurred, but the door

remains open and anyone can still come in. The truth is people who would respond to God must do so "while it is today." There will not be people in God's eternal city being baptized into Christ. That must be done before the city of God descends from heaven.

#### **WHAT ABOUT THE EXPRESSIONS "NEAR" "AT HAND" ETC.?**

In most of these passages the translation is from the Greek word "mello." So called "preterists" make three mistakes in usage of this word. First, they assume that all passages where such words occur in reference to an "end," refer to the same event. Second, they make the mistake of thinking that God looks at time the same way we do, and third, they misdefine the word "mello." In addition they also ignore all of the "delay" passages in the scriptures, and there are several, and consider only the "imminency" passages.

The word "mello" is usually defined as "about to happen." But it is a mistake to think that it cannot refer to something that is a long way into the future. In fact, in Acts 22:16, this word is actually used to mean delay, as Ananias asks Saul, "Why are you waiting? (from mello). Arise and be baptised. . ."

Here are some instances in the Bible in which it refers to long periods of time:

**Nearly 400 years:** In Mat.11:14 this word is used to say of John the Baptist, "This is Elias which was for to come." (about to come). Malachi said this nearly 400 years earlier.

**1500 years:** In Acts 26:22-23 this word occurs twice in reference to things then happening "which Moses and the prophets did say should come." (were about to come - mello). And again that Christ "should show light unto the people." (was about to show light unto the people - mello). This prediction took 1500 years to fulfill.

**4,000 years:** In Romans 5:4 this word is used to say that Adam was "the figure of him that was to come." (was about to come - mello). From Adam to Christ was at least 4,000 years.

Looking at these scriptural facts, how can one say that "about to come" cannot refer to something 2,000 years in the future? Obviously it is a mistake to think that every passage in which "mello" occurs necessarily refers to something immediately imminent in terms of earthly time.

Many scholars recognize that this word is not just a designation of something imminent, but is a designation of something that is certain. Thayer, for example, sees it as denoting "those things which will come to pass by fixed necessity or divine appointment." (Lexicon, page 397).

#### **THE DELAY PASSAGES**

Mat. 24 itself has statements indicating delay in reference to the event referred to after verse 34, which is not the same event as is discussed in the verses prior to 34. The first event was not delayed and had signs by which its approach could be recognized. The second event will come "in a time when you think not." (Verses 44 & 50). No signs signalling its approach. But concerning the second event, when "heaven and earth shall pass away," an example of a delay passage occurs at verse 48 where Jesus said that if a servant says, "My Lord delays his coming," and begins to mistreat his fellow servants, he will be punished for it. How could he be convinced that a delay was occurring or convince anyone else of it unless there was some sort of delay in that coming?

Paul also speaks of this delay in reference to the "day of Christ," in 2 Thess. 2:2-3, and told them not to be deceived into thinking that it was just at hand. He said "that day will not come except there come a falling away first." (Verse 3).

Peter, as we have already mentioned, states that this delay exists and predicts that people will begin to scoff because of it. (2 Pet. 3:3-4). He even explains why the delay is necessary. Ironically, he applies it to the very event we are discussing here and on which we differ, the passing away of the heavens and the earth. The destruction of Jerusalem was not delayed. Clearly the other event referred to in Mat. 24, the passing of the heavens and the earth, was delayed and still is being delayed.

At verse 7 Peter says that the present heavens and earth are "kept in store" by the same word that created them in the first place, "reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of unGodly men." In these verses he uses the same words as did Jesus in Mat. 24:35, "euranos," and "ge." These are not words meaning an "age," as in verse 3 and verse 14 of Mat. 24. These words

mean the physical heavens and the physical earth, the grass, the rocks, the trees, the atmosphere, and even the sun, moon, and stars. In that third chapter Peter describes in graphic terms the destruction that is waiting for this world. Again here Preterists have to reject these explicit statements in favor of their theory.

At first exposure I did not see the AD 70 theory as anything having to do with fellowship or salvation. To me it seemed to be pretty much a harmless exercise in speculation about prophecies that men have speculated upon for centuries. But two factors are making it into much more than that. First, it ends up in a type of scripture denial that the Bible speaks of as spiritually fatal, denial of a coming resurrection. Second, it has in recent years developed an aggressiveness that was not there originally and this has made it a troublesome "issue," capable of dividing churches. Paul wrote that to deny a coming resurrection is to reduce faith to vanity and leave people yet in their sins. (1 Cor. 15:12-17). He also said that when Hymenaeus and Philetus taught that the resurrection was past already, they overthrew the faith of some. (2 Tim. 2:17-18). These brethren are saying these two things, that no general resurrection is yet to come and that the resurrection has past already. So it is **(1)** destructive of vital elements of the faith and **(2)** in recent years has come to be divisive. So it is a consequential mistake.

### **THE SCOPE OF OUR STUDY**

This is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of all the arguments offered on behalf of that theory. It would take a large book to analyze in detail each of the many avenues of thought which grow out of that basic concept, and it isn't needed. Getting tangled up in a lot of irrelevant argumentation about possible interpretations of certain prophecies would not clarify the central questions involved. Anyone can guess about fulfillments of any prophecy and likely there will be many varying opinions. But the issues at stake here are basic, relatively simple questions, on which we have explicit Bible statements with which to make comparisons.

The thing wrong with their arguments based on prophecies is not that the words in a given prophecy could not mean what they

say they mean. Usually the application they make is one possible meaning, as far as the words in the text are concerned. But the fact that a certain meaning is one of several possible meanings does not prove that it is the right one. The answer to each of their arguments on prophecy is that their interpretation is in conflict with specific Bible statements to the contrary. No human theory about prophetic interpretation can be as reliable as the inspired statements of the Bible on the matter in question. What we need to do is go to the core of that teaching, look at its foundation stones, and see the picture it sets forth of "last things," and then compare these with Biblical facts. You could strive about words to no profit for an awful long time if you tried to dissect every prophecy they cite and argue the limits of its possibilities. To cut to the chase, so to speak, it is simply that any interpretation which directly contradicts express Bible statements is not within the realm of possibility. It fails the first test of any interpretation, the matter of over all Bible harmony.

A paper that used to be published among them carried this caption: "Resolved: The scriptures teach that the second coming of Christ, including the establishment of the eternal kingdom, the day of judgment, the end of the world, and the resurrection of the dead, occurred with the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70."

Now, if by "the end of the world," they mean the end of the Jewish age, they are right. If by "the return of Christ," they mean the symbolic return in judgment upon Israel, they are right. If by "the resurrection" they mean that some individuals were resurrected, again they are right. But if they mean the end of the physical cosmos, the resurrection of all the dead, and the final judgment, they are wrong. If by "the return of Jesus" they mean His triumphant return in glory to raise all the dead, judge the world, and reward His servants, they are guilty of an error that all eyes can observe for themselves. They are simply arguing with facts.

God made a covenant with Noah, the sign of which is the rainbow, that "While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease." (Gen. 8:22). We can all see that the rainbow has not ceased to appear in the sky. Therefore the earth still remains. When the

time comes that God sees fit to discontinue it, He will stop hanging out the sign that says it is still here and intact. How can a Bible believer observe the rainbow in the sky and still say, "The world ended 1900 years ago."

### **THE HOLY CITY, NEW JERUSALEM**

The symbolic "coming in judgment upon Jerusalem" is a long way from being the final and ultimate redemption God has in mind for His people. In that day He will "make all things new." According to the AD 70 theory that day has already occurred, the Holy city has come down, but things are still precisely as they were. Instead of there being "no more death nor sorrow nor crying and no more pain, for the former things are passed away," (Rev.21:4), we still have cancer, an AIDS epidemic, death for every one eventually, and crying, and none of these have passed away.

But they argue that these are destined to be only in a spiritual sense. But these are not spiritual ailments. No one ever got cancer of the spirit. No one gets AIDS in his spirit. If it is only the spirit that is exempt from these things then nothing has changed. It has always been that way on earth. But God said, "Behold I make all things new." The truth is, as Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:50, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption." This mortal must put on immortality and this corruptible must put on incorruption. (Vs. 52-53). In Max King's largest book he spends over 250 pages trying to explain away this entire chapter. When it takes that much "explaining" to support a theory, you know that theory has serious problems.

But their problem is not just with 1 Cor. 15. It is with the whole bible. When you conclude that there is no general resurrection day to come, no such scene as that in which all the dead are raised to stand before the throne of God for judgment, no time to come when people will exist in spiritual form apart from all of the sorrows that plague earthly life, you have gotten completely out of touch with the whole Bible perspective. You can scarcely find a page anywhere in the Bible that does not disagree with you. You have a totally different concept than what is pictured there. If the apostle Paul were here I suspect he would say, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (1 Cor. 15:19).

In fairness it should be said that they do believe that people are being taken to heaven in spiritual form as each one dies. I asked one of them about that one time and that is what he said. It is a little hard to see then, why they would deny the features John saw in Rev. 21. They say to me, "Don't you believe in figurative language in the Bible?" Sure I do. But when the word "figurative" is used to deny the teaching of an entire chapter, such as Rev. 21, or 1 Cor. 15, that is too much "figurativism."

### **HOW DID BELIEVERS WHO LIVED AT THE TIME PERCEIVE THE EVENTS OF AD 70?**

A few of the apostles yet lived at this time, as did many folks whom they had personally taught. Inspiration of the Holy Spirit was still there. So they knew what was going on. Thus the matter of how believers living at the time saw these events is important. What was their understanding of the matter?

When the smoke cleared and all the dust settled, did they believe that the second coming of Christ had occurred, as well as the judgment and the final resurrection? Did they believe the holy city John described in Revelation 21 had come down and they were now in it? Did they believe the eternal kingdom of God had come to complete fruition and all of God's promises about things to occur in the last days had been fulfilled? Did AD 70 change anything at all as concerns what they were looking forward to?

In all the information available from that time period there is not to be found a single shred of evidence that anyone living at the time saw it the way the AD 70 brethren do today. There are writings extant which were written by believers at that time and soon there after, but all of them say the same things precisely about their faith that were written prior to that time. They were, without exception, still looking forward to the second advent of Jesus yet to come, admonishing one another to be prepared at all times as Jesus had instructed, and holding the hope of a better world to come in a spiritual realm when this world would eventually perish.

A very large book would be filled if all such writings were quoted. Of course we will not try to do that here but we will give a

couple of "samples" which are typical of what was said in them all. These are not inspired writings, of course, and are offered here simply to indicate what was the viewpoint of eye witnesses, believers who lived at the time and had been taught personally by the apostles.

Ignatius was born in AD 50 and so was 20 years old in AD 70. He was martyred in the year 107. He was said to have been a personal disciple of the apostle John. Early in the second century he wrote, exhorting brethren in various places to continue holding to the hope they had always had. To the Ephesians, for example, he wrote, "Have a firm belief in the incarnation, the passion, the resurrection of Christ. These things are no delusive phantoms, but real facts. Let no one divert you from your hope."

Polycarp lived a few years later but was also said to have been a disciple of John personally. His writings likewise speak of all these things as yet to come in the future. In his epistle to the Phillipians he exhorted them to do faithful service to him "who cometh as judge of quick and dead; whose blood God will require of them that are disobedient to him. Now he that raised Him from the dead will raise us also; if we do his will and walk in his commandments and love the things which he loved..." In the same epistle he said, "For if we be well pleasing unto him in this present world, we shall receive the future world also, according as He has promised us, to raise us from the dead." Polycarp said very pointedly, "Whosoever shall pervert the words of the Lord to his own lust and say there is neither resurrection nor judgment, that man is the first born of Satan."

AD 70 advocates claim John's writings, especially the book of Revelation, as much of their evidence. But these disciples of John, along with Barnabas, Clement, and all others who lived in the proximity of the time of the AD 70 holocaust, say clearly in their writings that they continued to look forward to all that the Christian hoped for as something yet to come and that it was to occur in another world, spiritual in nature. If it happened in AD 70, all the personal pupils of John who ever wrote, misunderstood it.

## **THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD'S OWN FAMILY**

A piece of historic information that may have been providentially preserved to shed light on this question is the testimony of the next generation of Jesus' own fleshly family.

Historian Eusebius records that a few years after AD 70 emperor Domitian decreed that all descendents of David were to be executed. Jesus and his brothers and sisters were descendents of David. The grandchildren of Jesus' brother Judas were taken before the emperor for questioning. Eusebius says that during this questioning, "When asked also respecting Christ and his kingdom, what was its nature and when and where it was to appear, they replied that it was not a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but celestial and angelic; that it would appear at the end of the world, when in glory He would judge the quick and dead and give to everyone according to his works..." Upon which Domitian despising them, made no reply, but treating them with contempt, as simpletons, commanded them to be dismissed, and by decree, ordered the persecution to cease. (Eusebius Eccl.Hist.- pg 103).

Regardless of how appealing this theory may seem to be, it is groundless. There are too many parts of it that directly contradict explicit scriptures. We do not deny that the Bible sometimes uses figurative language. But that does not justify this kind of abuse. The bottom line is the AD 70 theory is incompatible with the Bible. We have only touched the hem of the garment here. Paul said, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (1 Cor. 15:26). Since death is as common to the race of man now as it ever was, one cannot rationally believe the AD 70 theory that "all the prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ have been fulfilled."

It is not our purpose to judge, convict, or defeat anyone. This is simply an appeal to God fearing people to hold fast to the word of God and be not led away by human theories that contradict it. There is nothing to be gained in the AD 70 theory, no land of promise in the direction in which it points. It would take away the beautiful hope described in the Bible and put nothing in its place. The Bible warns that there is a definite spiritual danger in denying the coming of the day of God, for in that day things will occur exactly as He has decreed. We must plan on that. Think about it!