

# **THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD**

**By the Rt. Reverend Philip N. Odhner**

**Based on the teachings given through Emanuel Swedenborg**

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The Lord Jesus Christ foretold that He would come again into the world. Of this we read as follows:

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be ... Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."  
(Matthew 24: 27, 29, 30.)

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh:" (Luke 21 :25-28.)

"Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand' of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:62.)

"Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so. Amen."  
(Apocalypse 1:7.)

"I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am there ye may be also."  
(John 14:3.)

.. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." (John 14: 18.)

"These things have I spoken unto you in parables: but the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in parables, but I shall show you plainly of the Father." (John 16.25.)

Because of these and similar teachings, Christians have been led to look forward to the time of the Second Advent, to the time when the Lord would again be with them on earth. They have looked forward with great hope and longing for the Lord to come and establish His kingdom here

on earth. They look forward to His coming as the millennium, when all that is evil will be judged and removed, when peace and justice will reign forever with men.

Even as the Jews looked to the first coming of the Lord, as is shown in the many prophecies of the First Advent in the Old Testament, so the Christians have looked for His coming again, in fulfillment of His promise given in the New Testament.

We can learn much by the drawing of a parallel between the way in which the Jews looked forward to the First Advent, and the way in which Christians have looked forward to the Second Advent. The Coming of the Messiah dominated the religious thought of the Israelitish and Jewish Churches. The Lord in the Old Testament foretold that He would come into the world as their Redeemer and King, and that He would rule over them and make of them the greatest of nations. The Jews thought of all these things in a purely natural, literal manner. For the most part they expected an earthly king, one who would deliver them from their enemies and destroy all other nations who would not yield and serve them. They looked for a worldly hero, a conqueror who would give them worldly power and glory. And so it was that when their Messiah came to them teaching a heavenly kingdom and a message of peace and love and truth, they did not recognize Him. They would have nothing of a Savior who did not fulfill their worldly interpretations of the prophecies, who would not give them the power and wealth for which they craved. So they mocked and rejected Him and finally asked that He be put to death. Only a very few, like Anna the prophetess, and Simeon, the few who were just and devout and awaiting the consolation of Israel, recognized their Lord and received Him. Even the twelve disciples were filled with the idea that He would be an earthly king who would make them rulers over the twelve tribes of Israel, for which the Lord had to rebuke them, and to teach them many times that His was not an earthly kingdom.

The Jews even to this day do not realize that their Messiah has come, and they go on vainly waiting for the time when He shall appear and gather them out of the lands and make them rulers of the earth.

With such an example of misconception and misunderstanding of the Coming of the Lord before them, one might suppose that Christians would above all else seek to avoid a literal and worldly view of the Second Coming of the Lord. From all the teachings which the Lord gave, that His was not a worldly or natural kingdom, but a heavenly or spiritual kingdom, it might be supposed that Christians would look for a spiritual meaning in the prophecies of the Second Advent, and that it would be realized that if such a spiritual or heavenly meaning was not seen, then the Lord would be rejected by Christians at His Second Coming even as He was rejected by the Jews at the time of the First Advent.

But what do we find taught in the Christian Churches today about their greatest hope and expectation? We find that nowhere is there any but a literal and worldly interpretation of the prophecies of the Second Coming. It is taught that when the Lord comes again He will perform a

great judgment by destroying the heavens and the earth: that He will destroy all who do not believe in Him, and save all who do believe in Him, that is, the Christians: that He will make a new earth, new sun and moon, new stars, and that then He will rule over His faithful followers personally, as a king rules over his subjects.

The identity between these teachings about the Lord's Second Coming, and the views of the majority of the Jews about His First Coming is astounding. In both we have the looking forward to a worldly king and a worldly kingdom. (The fact that the Christians believe that it will be a new world does not make their concept any the less worldly.) Both teach that the Lord in His Coming will save them and nobody else. Both are based upon a merely literal, natural, interpretation of their Scriptures. There is nothing a whit more spiritual in the Christians' thoughts about the Second Coming than there was in the Jews' thoughts about the coming of the Messiah. The great question is then, if the Lord had come again into the world, would the Christian Church have recognized Him any more than the Jews recognized Him at His First Coming? Is it not possible that Christians would no more recognize Him from their worldly thought concerning Him than the Jews did from their worldly thought? Often, we hear the question asked, If the Lord should come into the world, now; would men know and receive Him? We would like to ask this further question, Is it not possible that the Lord has come again into the world, in a spiritual manner as far removed from the material thought of Christians about His Coming as His actual First Advent was removed from the material thought of the Jews about their Messiah? Is it not possible that the Lord has already come to establish His spiritual kingdom, and that the Christian Churches look forward to what is already an accomplished but unrecognized fact, even as the Jews look forward to what is an accomplished but with them an unrecognized fact?

We are apt to be scornful of the Jewish view of a worldly king as their Messiah, a king who would make them the greatest of nations. We know that when the Lord in the Old Testament said He would come as a king He meant a heavenly king, and that the true Israelites of whom He makes a great nation are the sincere and faithful whom He brings into His heavenly kingdom. We can see that the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah were symbolical, that the Lord's spiritual kingdom was there set forth as if it were going to be a natural kingdom, and the Lord's spiritual kingship set forth as though He were to be a natural king. This has been clearly seen in the Christian Church. If it were not seen, then no one could possibly accept the Lord as the promised Messiah. But, in spite of this, Christians themselves have taken a merely natural view of the prophecies of the Second Coming. When the prophecy says that the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven, Christians have insisted that this is a description of the destruction of the natural universe. And when the prophecy reads that the Lord shall come again in the clouds of heaven, they think of the literal clouds of the sky, and that the Lord and His angels in some remarkable way will go riding around the earth in a cloud in such a way that all can see Him. Such a fantastic interpretation of the prophecies make the Jewish dream about an earthly Messiah look fairly reasonable by comparison.

It may be asked, What other meaning can be given to these prophecies? To this we would reply, A spiritual meaning, a meaning that has relation to man's spiritual life, and to the life of the Church, which is the Lord's kingdom on earth. That we should strive to understand these prophecies spiritually is evident not only from the fact that the Lord's kingdom is ever and always a spiritual kingdom, but also from this, that the Second Coming of the Lord is likened to the coming of a thief at night, and we are therefore admonished to watch for it diligently:

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." (Matthew 24: 42-44.)

"If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (Apocalypse 3:3.)

It is clear from these quotations that the Lord will not come riding around the earth on a cloud, with a loud blowing of trumpets. There would be no need of watching for His Coming if this were to be the case. Nor can the watching which we are here admonished to do have reference to star-gazing in the sky for some natural sign of His Coming. This watching must be done in our own hearts and minds. It must be a searching of our understanding to see that our look is directed to the Lord in a spiritual and not in merely a worldly manner. It must be a searching for the truth of what is meant by the Second Coming of the Lord so that we may indeed be prepared to recognize His Coming and receive Him.

The signs of the Second Coming mentioned in Matthew and Luke, the wars and rumors of wars, the time of great tribulation, the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars, have no reference to merely worldly events. Do not for one minute allow yourselves to think that they do. Many believe that the present worldly disturbances are signs of the Second Coming. But there have been wars and rumors of wars ever since worldly kingdoms first arose, yea even far worse destruction of civilizations than that which now impends. To think of these things as worldly events is to think of them naturally, even as did the Jews about the Lord's First Advent. These things have reference to the spiritual states of the Church. The wars and the rumors of wars have reference to the continual combat about the truths of faith in the Church, the darkening of the sun and moon have reference to the failing of charity and faith in the church. The sun, from which comes all heat and light, is the symbol for love or charity in the Church from the Lord, out of which is all spiritual life for the men of the Church. And the moon, which reflects the light of the sun and gives that light upon the earth in the nighttime refers to the truths of faith which shine and have meaning when they reflect charity or love, but which are obscure and meaningless when there is no charity in the heart. The stars which fall from heaven are not the great suns and planets of the natural universe. Why should these ever fall, and where would they fall? These stars are the knowledges of spiritual things out of the Word of God, which knowledges disappear from the Church when charity and faith no longer reign in it.

What has the visible universe to do with the fallen states of men? Can we say that the universe is evil and has to be destroyed in the judgment because the men who inhabit it have lost their faith and charity? Obviously the universe referred to in this prophecy is a spiritual one. The sun there is the Lord Himself and the love which proceeds from Him to men. Everywhere in the Bible the Lord is described as the sun. This sun is said to be darkened when men no longer receive the Lord's love; not that the Lord in Himself becomes darkened, but that He is no longer clearly seen and loved by the men of the Church. That the moon signifies the truths of faith with the men of the Church is evident from the fact that the truths of the faith of the Church give light to men only when they reflect the light of love, only when they are acknowledged and perceived from love, just as the moon gives light upon the earth when it reflects the light of the sun, and not otherwise. That the stars of heaven which are said to fall at the time of the Lord's Second Coming signify the knowledges of what is good and true out of the Word of God in the Church is evident from the fact that stars everywhere in the Word are used to designate the knowledges of good and truth. The Lord Himself is called the bright and morning star. The angels are called stars, (Rev. I: 16,20.) What else can be meant by the star of the east which led the wisemen to the Lord other than their knowledge of the Lord out of His Word? Whenever we see the Divine Truth reflected in the knowledges contained in the Bible it is like seeing a star which can lead us to a life of love and worship of the Lord, if we follow it.

That the sun and moon and stars which are said to be destroyed at the Coming of the Lord are the charity and faith and the consequent living knowledge of spiritual things in the men of the Church, may be evident to Christians from this: that in the Old Testament also it was prophesied that when the Lord should make His First Advent the sun and the moon and the stars should be obscured and fall, in almost the same words that are used of the Lord's Second Advent. and yet we know that when the Lord came into the world these things were not literally done. Of this we read as follows:

"I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth. Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come." (Joel 2:30,31.)

"Behold the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine." (Isaiah 13:9,10.)

Is it not clear that these things, predicted of the Lord's first coming, have no reference to the destruction of the visible universe, and that they do indeed have reference to the destruction of charity and faith and the knowledges of spiritual things in the Jewish Church? And can we not see that such predictions given to us about the Second Advent do not refer to the visible universe, but that they too have reference to the spiritual things of the Lord's Church on earth? To her charity and faith and to her knowledge?

But what is meant by the Coming of the Lord in the clouds of heaven? The question is, what are the clouds of heaven? To think of the clouds of heaven as the clouds of the natural atmosphere is to make a mockery of the Coming of the Lord. It should be clear to all that by the clouds of heaven are meant spiritual clouds and not natural clouds. Spiritual clouds are what accommodate spiritual light to man's understanding, and they are also those things which sometimes obscure that light. We use the word 'cloud' in this spiritual sense many times in our common speech. We speak of a man being in a cloud when he cannot understand something. We also speak of light shining through or breaking through the clouds when, after some period of doubt and confusion, we at last are given to understand. These mental things which we call clouds in our minds are the varying and conflicting appearances about any truth that we desire to see. From certain considerations a thing will appear in one way, and from other considerations it will appear to be something different. Not until all considerations are put in their true order and rightly explained can we at last see the light through the clouds. In such a way is the word 'cloud' used in the Bible. The clouds of heaven are the many things of the Word of God whereby the Lord appears to us. They are the many teachings of the literal sense of the Bible, each of which presents some truth about the Lord and His kingdom. If we understand these teachings, if they are explained and unfolded to us in their true order, then we see Divine light in those clouds. If we do not understand them, and if they are not unfolded to us in their true order, then they appear contradictory to us and as paradoxes and mysteries, through which we receive no light.

The Word is the cloud of heaven, the means whereby, if we understand it, the Divine Truth is accommodated to our minds and lives. That this is meant by cloud in the Bible may be evident from the fact that the Lord so often appeared in clouds, to the children of Israel, to Moses upon Mount Sinai, and to Peter and James and John in the transfiguration. At the transfiguration, the Lord appeared in a cloud together with Moses and Elias. By Moses and Elias the Law and the Prophets are typified, thus the whole Word of God.

When it is said therefore that the Lord will come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, it is meant that He will appear to men in His Word as the Divine Truth. By His glory is meant the Divine truth shining from His love, and by the power is meant the power of the Divine truth to effect the regeneration of the human race. This is the spiritual meaning of the Second Advent of the Lord.

That the Lord was to come in the clouds of heaven, after the destruction of the sun and the moon and the stars, signifies that He was to come in the Divine truth appearing in His Word, after the loss of the charity and faith, and of the knowledge of spiritual things, in the Church.

It is our belief that this Second Coming of the Lord has already taken place in the world. We believe that the Lord has come again into the world in the clouds of heaven; that He has come again in a new revelation of His Word, and that He has given to the world a basis for a spiritual and rational understanding of the mysteries of faith. We believe that the Lord in His Glorified Human, in His Divine Human, has revealed Himself to men. In this revelation men can, if they

will, follow Him, see Him in a spiritual sense, and be conjoined to Him in a new faith, a new love and a new life that is from Him. We believe that the Lord has done these things by revealing the spiritual sense of the Bible to Emanuel Swedenborg,

His servant, and by opening Swedenborg's spiritual sight to see the wonderful things of Heaven and of the life after death. Through this revelation men can be brought to a spiritual rational understanding of the mysteries of faith concerning God, concerning His Word, concerning the regeneration of man and concerning eternal life.

In the revelation given by the Lord through Swedenborg we find a full explanation of the consummation of the first Christian Church represented by the darkening of the sun and the moon, and by the falling of the stars of heaven. In this revelation we read of the fulfillment of the first state of the Christian Church with men, and of the new state of the Christian Church, the New Church, into which men may now enter, if they will.

In making His Second Coming, the Lord has removed the barriers which made it impossible for the inmost mysteries of the Christian religion to be received in the understanding. Men can now enter intellectually into the arcana of faith. As their lives are more and more purified and formed through this revelation, so their understanding also is opened to receive the Divine Truths of the Word in a rational form. Now has the time come of which the Lord spoke, "The time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in parables, but I will show you plainly of the Father." (John 16:25.)

You may ask why, if these things have come to pass, the world does not know about them and acknowledge them. The answer is much the same now as it was in the time of the First Advent, namely, that men have come into such worldliness that they are not looking for any coming of the Lord to them as spiritual truth, as a revelation of the internal things of His Word. They are looking for a literal fulfillment of the prophecies about His coming, and not for any spiritual fulfillment of them.

We cannot ask you to believe these things because we have stated them to be so, or because of our own overwhelming conviction that they are so. A man must see this as if of himself, and receive or reject according to whether or not he can see and believe it to be so. But if you are among those who watch for the Coming of the Lord, among those who desire to seek the Lord where He may be found, among those who desire to see and receive Him in His Coming, it is incumbent upon you for the welfare of your souls to investigate the things revealed by the Lord through His servant Swedenborg.

A new religion has been given to this world, a spiritual rational religion in which the Lord can lead men ever more interiorly into spiritual peace and internal blessedness of life. It is a Christian religion, yea, it may be called the True Christian Religion. It is truly Christian because it teaches the Lord Jesus Christ as the one and only God of Heaven and earth, as the one Divine Man, the visible and knowable God whom alone we should love and worship. With this religion a new

age, a new dispensation has begun. It is an age of the love and understanding of spiritual truth, an age of spiritual light and peace. Quietly and unnoticed amidst the wars, the noise and clamor that mark the passing of the old, the seeds of the message of the Lord in His Second Coming are being sown and received, and in time they will grow to produce the everlasting Kingdom of the Lord, not a worldly kingdom, but one in the hearts and minds of men.

This New Church is represented in the Apocalypse by the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, which also is called the Bride and Wife of the Lord. It is there called a city because of its Doctrine, which will be pure truths seen in the Word .out of its love of the Lord. And it is called the Bride and Wife because of its love of the Lord God Jesus Christ, and its conjunction with Him in love and faith.

Footnote: Jews and Christians are referenced as representative of their church in its historical perspective.

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