

THE AD 70 DOCTRINE

WHAT IS IT?

The AD 70 doctrine is a position that maintains that all prophecy of Scripture has been fulfilled by the year AD 70. For example, Max King, a proponent of this position wrote, "There is no scriptural basis for extending the second coming of Christ beyond the fall of Judaism."ⁱ This doctrine is also referred to as "realized eschatology," where *eschatology* is of the subject matter of "last things" and *realized* demands the completed fulfillment of those "last things." Hence, the AD 70 position interprets any and all prophecy to have its completion by the year AD 70. The second coming of Christ, the resurrection from the dead, inheriting the new heaven and earth, and the destruction of the world, according to this doctrine, has already occurred!

To maintain this view in the face of such plain teaching in Scripture, realized eschatologists are compelled to spiritualize and allegorize the terminology of the Holy Spirit. Passages that speak of a future bodily "resurrection" can no longer have the idea of a bodily resurrection, but rather must now take on a spiritual meaning—a spiritual resurrection of Christianity out of the decaying system of Judaism (1 Cor. 15). Problematic passages that speak of the "world" as our planet must now be draped with a new understanding—the Jewish world or age (cf. 2 Pet. 3:1ff). The *elements* that are burned up are also redefined as pertaining to the Law of Moses and have nothing to do with the actual *world* created in Genesis 1. Likewise, the *second coming* of Christ must now be interpreted to mean His coming upon the city of Jerusalem in destruction. In brief you get an idea of how these advocates approach the Holy Scriptures. Contexts are ignored, and new definitions are assigned to words. This loose approach to Scripture guiltlessly grabs words from one context and misapplies that definition to another. In short this doctrine *rests* upon the *wresting* of the Scriptures. In the balance of this short work, we will present some insurmountable problems with realized eschatology.

REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY IN THE SCRIPTURES

There are only two places in Scripture which refer to eschatology being realized. In warning against vain and idle babblings, Paul identified Hymenaeus and Philetus as realized eschatologists:

"And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that **the resurrection is already past**; and they overthrow the faith of some"ⁱⁱ (2 Tim. 2:17, 18, emp. mine, sjw).

Why they taught such is unknown, but the effects of this doctrine was not. It was cancerous, straying from the faith, and overthrowing the faith in others. The fruit of this doctrine tells on the tree (Luke 6:44).

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2, Paul warned:

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.”

While so much more could be said about this passage in reference to our subject, Paul is clear that this idea did not spawn from the apostles. They had no doctrine that was in accord with it, they spoke no word that supported it, and they wrote no letter to endorse it. It was and is solely the creation of man.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Realized eschatology asserts that the second coming of Christ cannot have its fulfillment beyond the destruction of Jerusalem. Advocates confuse the personal coming of Jesus with symbolic comings. There are two figurative or symbolic comings of Jesus mentioned in the New Testament and even in the same book!

1. Matthew 10:23 speaks of a representative coming of Christ.

“When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

This text has a context of giving a commission to the twelve apostles to limit their preaching in the beginning to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5, 6). Jesus sent the twelve out two by two and gave them power over unclean spirits, focusing on both repentance as well as the kingdom of heaven being at hand (see Matt. 10:6; Mark 6:7–12). It is equally clear that this limited commission had the seed of the unlimited commission built into it, as it would lead to a testimony to the *Jews and the Gentiles* (Matt. 10:17, 18). Jesus also spoke of their reception of the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:19, 20). To this point Matthew 10:23 is referring. Consider that Jesus had told them that they would *not* have gone through the cities of Israel *before the Son of Man comes*. That is, their preaching would not even have covered the cities of Israel before He comes. *But how did He come?* They were to preach about the coming kingdom (Matt. 10:6). Yet later, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). Jesus would *come in His kingdom*, and some in that time would see it. Again, *how would He come?* “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power” (Mark 9:1). The answer is that He would come with *power* in the giving forth of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:1–4). It is precisely this moment and in this way that Jesus speaks of coming to them: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... for He dwells with you

and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; **I will come to you**" (John 14:16–18, emp. mine, sjw). Jesus came representatively in the sending of the Holy Spirit to begin the kingdom.

2. Jesus came symbolically in the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:14, 30).

Matthew speaks of the judgment on Jerusalem distinctly from that coming in Matthew 10:23. Notice Matthew 24:30:

"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

This involves the judgment on Jerusalem. The Lord employs language similar to the prophets of old in discussing this dreadful day (compare Matt. 24:29, 30 with Is. 19:1; Ezek. 32:7, etc.). In contrast to Matthew 10:23, which spoke of the coming of the Son of man before they could cover the cities of Israel, this day against Jerusalem would not come until the gospel was preached in all the world (Matt. 24:14).

We can see from these two points the folly of taking a word or phrase and universally applying it to one event. The context defines how it is to be used.

3. Jesus will come again to judge all nations (Matt. 24:35–25:46).

Not only does Matthew speak of the coming of Christ *representatively* through the work of the Holy Spirit and *symbolically* in the judgment of Jerusalem, but He also speaks of His *literal* and final coming, when He will judge all nations. "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:37). He warned that even as the flood took them all away, so it will be when Jesus comes again (Matt. 24:39). In the same speech He warned against those who would be unprepared and would cease working when He comes again (Matt. 25:1–30). He pictured all the nations gathered to Him, where some are separated into everlasting life and others into everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:31, 32, 46). Consider when Jesus ascended into the heavens, the disciples watched, looked steadfastly, and gazed at Him leaving (Acts 1:9–11). Yet it is written, "... This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). He will come in a like manner as they saw Him go. There is no figurative or symbolic return here. He will appear in that same manner (cf. Heb. 9:28).

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

"I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15).

This passage, with others, becomes a bombshell for realized eschatology. The hope here is anticipatory and is shared with a leading sect of the Jews—the *Pharisees*.

Observe that Paul had a hope which was accepted by “they themselves.” What is that hope, and who *accepted* it? It was the hope of the resurrection of the dead. Who accepted it?

“For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23:8).

Note that the Pharisees confess what the Sadducees deny! The *kind* of resurrection which Paul embraced was rejected by the Sadducees. What did they reject? The Sadducees *who deny that there is a resurrection* presented an elaborate argument of a woman who was married seven times to attack a *bodily* resurrection (Luke 20:27–33). That it was a *bodily* resurrection is seen in their question, “Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife.” (Luke 20:33). The Lord’s answer is very relevant to our discussion.

“The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:34–36).

This *age* is where marriage is applicable, but those in “that age” are:

- Raised up.
- Not given in marriage.
- Not able to die again.
- Are equal to the angels (scorned by the Sadducees).

We conclude that to embrace realized eschatology is to deny the hope that Paul had and the teaching of Jesus. Are people still given to marriage after AD 70? Have people continued to die after AD 70? If this is spiritual for Christians in the Christian age, then such a position leads to the false theory of “once saved, always saved,” because they cannot die anymore. In *that age*, we are not only “sons of God” but are *equal* to angels. Presently we are sons of God but we are not equal to angels (1 John 3:1, 2).

Did the Pharisees *accept* the rise and power of Christianity out of the dying remains of Judaism as the resurrection? On the contrary, they wanted their nation to be preserved and spared from Rome’s wrath (John 11:47, 48). They and Paul agreed on a future resurrection of the dead—the just and unjust. That is the scope of this resurrection. It consists of everyone. Not the just only, but the unjust also. Hence, Paul comforted those early saints to not be overtaken in grief when

their comrades die, but to perceive it as “sleep” and look forward to that day when we would meet them and the Lord in the air at the resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

The AD 70 position is false. It corrupts the simplicity of the word. It corrupts our hope by denying the resurrection. It also corrupts our worship, as it would forbid the partaking of the Lord’s Supper and the singing of many songs that are anticipating the return of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26).

—Steven J. Wallace

ⁱ King, Max R. (1971). *The Spirit of Prophecy*, p 105.

ⁱⁱ All verses are from the New King James Version.