

The Future of Christmas

This Week's Devotions

Matthew 1:18-25
2 Thessalonians 2
2 Timothy 3
Isaiah 44:24-45:25
Daniel 9
Zechariah 14

Isaiah 55:10-11
*10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.¹*

Who is in control? How do you know?

Is there a plan controlling the world?

Why has God revealed the future?

Has He revealed all of it?

How should all of God's revealed prophecy affect you?

¹All Scripture taken from *the New King James Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, c1982.

The Lord Jesus Christ whom we exalt at Christmas is not just a baby in a manger. He is not a character in a children's story. He is far more.

The first time he came, he came veiled in the form of a child.

The next time he comes, and we believe it will be soon, he will come unveiled, and it will be abundantly and immediately clear to all the world just who he really is.

The first time he came, a star marked his arrival. The next time he comes, the whole heavens will roll up like a scroll, and all the stars will fall out of the sky, and he himself will light it.

The first time he came, wise men and shepherds brought him gifts. The next time he comes, he will bring gifts, rewards for his own.

The first time he came, there was no room for him. The next time he comes, the whole world will not be able to contain His glory.

The first time he came, only a few attended his arrival—some shepherds and some wise men. The next time he comes, every eye shall see him.

The first time he came as a baby. Soon he will come as Sovereign King and Lord.²

Jeremiah 29:11-13

11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

There is an aspect of Christmas that is often overlooked. This is the hope and future of the event, not in historical terms, but in terms of the future. Christmas is but part of a sequence of events covering thirty some years in the "life" of an eternal God. It is one bookend on the shelf of the earthly life of Jesus. The other bookend is the Cross of Calvary. In between, God came to earth as a man, to show man how to find the shelter of God's arms, a shelter that protects from the storms of life and the wages of sin.

²Green, Michael P., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House) 1989.

But, the future of Christmas extends beyond these bookends. Christmas is an incomplete event without the Cross and the Second Coming. God's plan continues to roll along. The map shows future landmarks we have not yet reached. Jesus is coming soon! This is the future of Christmas.

The world is without hope if it is without Jesus. This is the underlying concept of the entire Bible. Yet, while the Gospel is global in its reach (Matt 24), so are the hooks of Satan. The Herods of the world will return time and again. Ultimately the anti-Christ will rule the world for a short period. Why? Because the response of most to Christ is the response of Herod coupled with the response of the citizens of Jerusalem.

How many Christmas specials did you encounter this year on television? How many of these spoke to the true hope of Christmas?

Just as God had to take the form of a man so that we thick-headed beings could understand His revelation, so, too, we must recognize there are many prophecies remaining to be fulfilled. Christmas has shown us that prophecy is certain. When God speaks, we have the full assurance that His Words are true and events will come to pass just as He has told us.

At the same time, prophecy is very perplexing. It is not always understandable, especially in our terms. God has revealed events to us through the eyes of people who lived 2,000-to-3,500 years ago. Language changes. Since symbols, for the most part, had to be understandable to the writers and hearers of the original words, we need to interpret Scripture in the context in which it has been given to us. The recent Y2K "scare" is an example of over-reaching the meaning of prophecies.

Not all prophecy will be recognized until after the fact. The Jews did not always see events as prophecy while they occurred. For example, Hosea 11:1 and Matt 2:14-15:

Hosea 11:1

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son.

Matthew 2:14-15

14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

And, not all prophecy is fulfilled in the manner expected by men. Jesus is the prime example of this. A reading of the Old Testament will clearly demonstrate that the prophets failed to find or understand the church age. The First and Second Comings of the Messiah were virtually simultaneous events for the Old Testament prophet. This accounts, in part, for the failure of the Jewish people to recognize Jesus for who He was.

It is important to understand that prophecy is not given so that we may know God's plans in advance. Prophecy is designed to enable us to see all of history as being part of God's plan. Prophecy and history combine to provide us with hope in God's plan and purpose. God truly is in control of the world. God's plan is in motion. We must recognize this fact and trust in God.

Peter frequently uses the Second Coming as the ultimate statement of hope. Jesus will return and exercise His rights as King. But, this Second Coming is only possible if there is a Christmas. Christmas does not stand alone – but it is absolutely necessary to God's plan. Christmas is the focal point of the plan in history.

Galatians 4:4

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law

See also Matt 24, Luke 21, Mark 13, Rev, esp 19-22

- God's plan for the future is the basis for faith and obedience. It provides us with the motivation to place our full trust and obedience in God.

2 Peter 1:19

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;

See also 2 Pet 3:11-12; Is 55:10,11; 1 Thess 1:9-10, 2:19-20

- God's plan for the future provides us with comfort, especially in overcoming the fear of death.

Philippians 1:19-21

19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also

Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
See also 2 Tim 1:11-13; Rom 8:18

- God’s plan includes the existence of Heaven and Hell. This should provide a stark contrast leading to motivation for the unsaved to seek God.
Acts 2:38-40
38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”
- The revealing of God’s plan in a form you can understand makes you God’s friend (John 15:15) and child (1 John 3:1, 2).

Do you know the future?

Well, sort of . . .

Our Christian disagreements over the future should not prevent us from spreading the Gospel message. Some disagreements over the interpretation of prophecy are legitimate. But, one must ask, why would God reveal the future? Or, why has God not revealed all of it to us? And, why does He make it so hard to understand?

Paul speaks of mysteries. God has given us enough revelation to accomplish two things in life –

First, He has revealed Himself and His purpose in desiring to draw us back to Him. His Word shows us HOW TO FIND GOD.

Second, He has revealed to us His purposes for living and how to accomplish this. His Word shows us HOW TO LIVE ONCE WE HAVE FOUND GOD.

Too many people attempt to interpret God’s Word and provide us answers to the second question without having cleared the first hurdle. Have you done this? Have you skipped salvation in an effort to learn how to be a good person and live a godly life?

However, mysteries seem to remain. God's revelation ends with Jesus. But, it ends with all of the promises held in the life of Jesus, past, present, and future. Christ will return to complete the fulfillment of prophecies. This return is what the book of Revelation is all about.

Have you found God?

If so, have you incorporated His teachings into your life?

If not, why not?