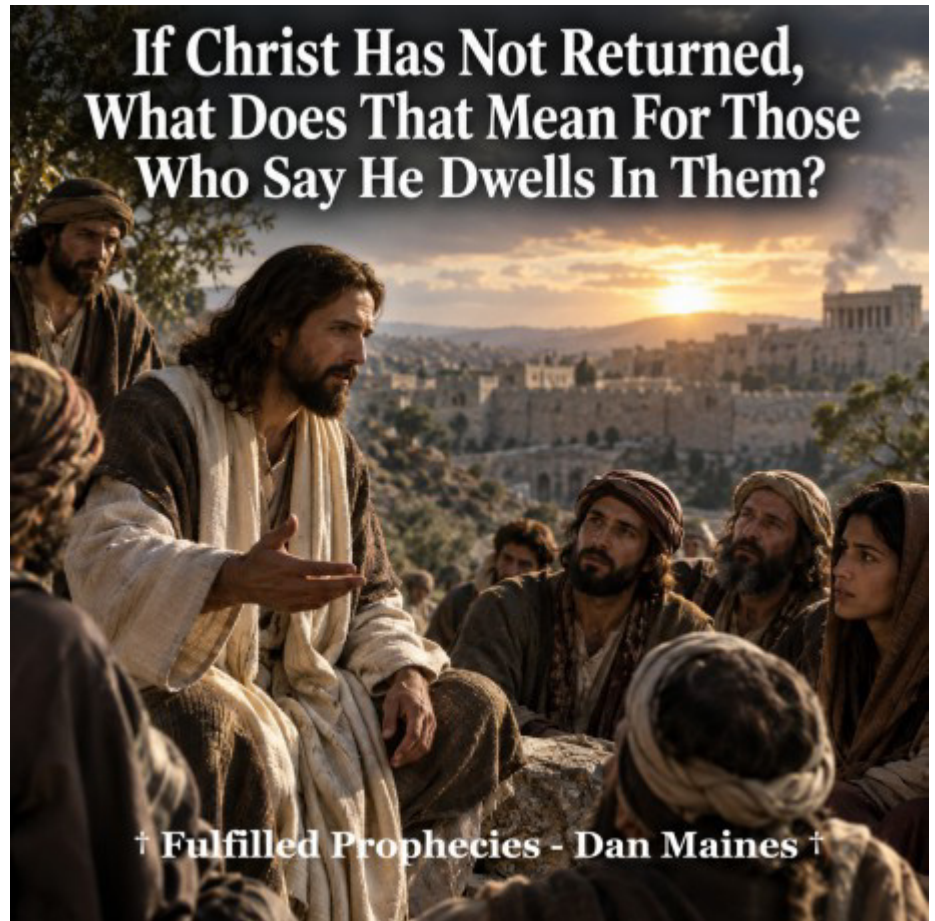


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If Christ Has Not Returned, What Does That Mean For Those Who Say He Dwells In Them?



By Dan Maines

If Christ Has Not Returned, What Does That Mean For Those Who Say He Dwells In Them?

Introduction

† Many Christians say Jesus Christ hasn't returned, yet at the same time they say Christ lives in them, they are united with Him, they belong to His completed kingdom, and they possess the salvation He promised. The problem is that the New Testament connected Christ's coming with the completion of redemption, the gathering of His people, entrance into His presence, and the full establishment of the covenant order they

were awaiting.

† This doesn't mean the disciples had no relationship with Christ or no indwelling Holy Spirit before AD 70. They certainly did. The issue is the completion of what had already begun. They had the Spirit as the pledge of their inheritance while they waited for redemption to reach its promised covenantal completion (Ephesians 1:13-14).

† If Christ's promised coming is still future, then the New Testament's promised consummation is still future. If the consummation is still future, Christians today can't consistently claim to be living completely inside everything that coming was promised to accomplish.

† The fulfilled view doesn't leave Christians waiting outside the completed work of redemption. Christ came as He promised, the old covenant age reached its end, His kingdom stands established, and His people now live in the completed new covenant reality.

John 14:18-20

I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. After a little while, the world no longer is going to see Me, but you are going to see Me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I in you.

† Jesus connected His coming with His disciples knowing the reality expressed in these words, you in Me, and I in you. He wasn't describing abandonment, but fellowship and union with Him.

† Notice the language of expectation. Jesus said He wouldn't leave them as orphans. He promised, I come to you. The promise belonged to those disciples standing before Him.

† Christians today commonly confess that Christ is in them. Yet Jesus connected this promised relationship with what He was accomplishing for His people, not with an endlessly postponed hope (John 14:23).

† The indwelling presence of Christ began through the Spirit before AD 70, but that doesn't require us to push Christ's promised coming thousands of years beyond the disciples to

whom He spoke.

John 14:23

Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will follow My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him.

† Jesus didn't describe a God who would remain distant from His people. He promised that the Father and Son would make their dwelling with them.

† This points directly toward the dwelling-place language that reaches its covenantal fulfillment when God's dwelling is with His people (Revelation 21:3).

† If someone insists that every promise associated with Christ's coming remains unfulfilled, that position creates a serious problem when the same person claims to enjoy the completed dwelling, kingdom, redemption, and covenant blessings associated with fulfillment.

† Christ isn't absent from His people today. He dwells with His people because His promises didn't fail.

Hebrews 9:28

so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

† The writer didn't tell his first-century audience that Christ's second appearing would occur thousands of years after they died. He spoke about those who were waiting for Him.

† Notice what the passage connects with His appearing, salvation. This doesn't mean those believers had no salvation before His appearing. Salvation was already theirs in Christ, but its covenantal consummation was still approaching (Hebrews 10:37).

† This is why saying Christ hasn't returned creates a theological problem. If the appearing unto salvation remains future, then the salvation connected with that appearing remains awaiting its stated consummation.

† We don't have to live with that contradiction. Christ fulfilled His

promise, and believers now live after the completed transition into the new covenant age.

Romans 13:11-12

Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let's rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

† Paul wrote to people who were already believers, yet he said their salvation was nearer than when they first believed. He was speaking about the approaching completion of their redemptive hope.

† Paul didn't say the day was thousands of years away. He said the day was at hand.

† If that day still hasn't arrived, then the salvation Paul said was drawing nearer has remained approaching for roughly two thousand years. That doesn't fit the urgency of his words.

† The fulfilled perspective takes Paul's timing seriously. The night of the old covenant age was passing, and the promised day was approaching.

Hebrews 10:36-37

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.

† The Hebrew Christians were told they needed endurance because they were about to receive the promise.

† The writer didn't say Christ might come after thousands of years. He said, a very little while, and specifically said He wouldn't delay.

† If Christ still hasn't come, then the plain time language becomes extremely difficult to explain. A delay of approximately two thousand years doesn't naturally fit a very little while.

† Christ kept His word. The problem isn't His promise, but an interpretation that continually moves His promised coming away

from the generation that was told to expect it.

1 John 2:28

Now, little children, remain in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not draw back from Him in shame at His coming.

† John wrote to living first-century believers and told them to remain in Christ in view of His coming.

† Notice John's words, we may have boldness. John included himself and his contemporaries in the expectation surrounding that coming.

† Their abiding in Christ and their expectation of His coming weren't competing truths. They already belonged to Christ while awaiting the consummation that His coming would bring.

† This distinction is important. We shouldn't argue that nobody could have Christ dwelling in them before AD 70, because the apostles plainly taught that Christ already dwelled in believers. The stronger argument is that Christians today shouldn't place the consummating coming forever in the future while claiming every completed covenant blessing associated with the age that followed it.

Colossians 1:27

to whom God willed to make known what the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles is, the mystery that is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

† Christ was already in His first-century people. Paul states this plainly.

† Yet notice that Paul called Christ in them the hope of glory. They possessed Christ while still anticipating the approaching completion of the redemptive transition.

† This protects us from making an argument Scripture itself doesn't make. Christ's indwelling didn't begin at AD 70. The Holy Spirit had already been given, and Christ already dwelled in His people.

† What AD 70 brought was the covenantal consummation of the age-changing promises connected with Christ's coming,

judgment, resurrection hope, and the removal of the obsolete covenant order (Hebrews 8:13).

Ephesians 1:13-14

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of the promise, who is a first installment of our inheritance, in regard to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

† The first-century believers already had the Holy Spirit, but Paul described the Spirit as the pledge of their inheritance.

† They possessed the guarantee while awaiting the promised redemption associated with the completion of God's covenant purpose.

† This is why we must distinguish inauguration from consummation. Pentecost began realities that reached their covenantal maturity as the old age passed away.

† Christians today aren't living in that forty-year transition. We live after the old covenant order was removed and in the established new covenant kingdom.

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† The movement wasn't toward an earthly Jerusalem but toward Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, Jesus, and the new covenant.

† The New Testament story is the movement from the old covenant world into the completed new covenant reality.

† We aren't waiting for Christ to establish another covenant age in our future. We have access to God through Christ now, and we belong to the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:26).

† Christ's people can say He is with us, He dwells in us, and we belong to His kingdom because His promises reached their appointed fulfillment.

Revelation 21:2-3

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† Revelation brings the dwelling theme to its glorious covenantal conclusion. God's dwelling is with His people.

† This is the New Jerusalem reality Christians claim belongs to them today. Yet Revelation itself repeatedly said these events were near and would happen soon (Revelation 1:1-3; 22:6, 10).

† If Revelation 21 remains entirely future, then consistency requires asking whether the covenantal dwelling described here also remains future.

† The fulfilled view has no such contradiction. The promised judgment came, the old covenant city fell, the New Jerusalem was revealed as the covenant dwelling of God with His people, and its gates remain open.

Historical References

† Josephus described the catastrophic Jewish-Roman war, Jerusalem's siege, the destruction of the temple, and the fall of the city in AD 70. His history provides an important non-Christian witness to the historical judgment that occurred within the first-century generation.

† Eusebius later recorded the early Christian tradition that believers in Jerusalem departed before the war and settled at Pella. He connected the destruction that followed with judgment upon Jerusalem.

† These historical writers don't establish the theological meaning of Christ's coming, Scripture does that. Their value is that they document the extraordinary first-century events

surrounding Jerusalem's destruction.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't have to say Jesus is still absent while simultaneously saying He lives in us. Christ is present with His people.

† We don't have to say the salvation connected with His appearing is still waiting for completion. We live in the completed new covenant reality purchased by Christ.

† We don't have to say the New Jerusalem is still entirely future while claiming that we've already come to the heavenly Jerusalem.

† We don't have to say the kingdom hasn't fully arrived while claiming Christ has already transferred us into His kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

† We don't have to say the promised coming remains future while claiming all the covenant blessings associated with its fulfillment are already ours.

† This doesn't mean nobody was saved or indwelt by Christ before AD 70. Scripture plainly says first-century believers were saved, had the Holy Spirit, and had Christ dwelling in them. The issue is consummation, not whether salvation existed before AD 70.

† If Christ's coming remains unfulfilled, then the consummation explicitly connected with that coming must also remain unfulfilled. But if we're living in the completed new covenant age, enjoying the established kingdom, the heavenly Jerusalem, access to God, and His dwelling with His people, then we should recognize that Christ fulfilled the coming He promised.

† Jesus didn't fail. Jesus didn't delay for thousands of years. Jesus didn't leave His first-century disciples waiting for a promise they would never see. He came in judgment and kingdom exactly as He promised, and we're living in the covenant reality that followed.

Q & A Appendix

Q: If Christ hasn't returned, does that mean nobody can have Christ dwelling in them?

A: No. The first-century believers had Christ dwelling in them before the consummating events of AD 70 (Colossians 1:27). They also had the Holy Spirit as the pledge of their inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). The argument isn't that indwelling was impossible before Christ's coming, but that the completed covenant blessings associated with His coming can't consistently be pushed entirely into our future while Christians claim to possess their completed reality now.

Q: If Christ hasn't returned, are Christians saved?

A: The apostles described believers as already saved while also describing an approaching consummation of salvation (Romans 13:11; Hebrews 9:28). Therefore, the precise point is this: if Christ's promised appearing remains future, then the consummation connected with that appearing also remains future. The fulfilled view holds that Christ came as promised and brought that first-century redemptive transition to completion.

Q: Can we say that Christ and believers are one today?

A: Yes. Jesus prayed that His people would share in this unity, and He described believers as being in Him and He in them (John 14:20; 17:20-23). Christians today can confidently speak of union with Christ because His covenant promises haven't failed.

Q: Why does the timing of Christ's coming matter?

A: Because Scripture repeatedly connected His coming with promises made directly to first-century believers. Jesus said some standing before Him wouldn't die before seeing the Son of Man coming in His kingdom, and He said all these things would happen within that generation (Matthew 16:27-28; 24:34). The apostles likewise described His coming as near (Hebrews

10:37; James 5:8-9).

Q: What does this mean for Christians today?

A: It means we're not waiting for Christ to finish the covenant transition the apostles were awaiting. We live under the new covenant, belong to Christ's kingdom, have access to the Father, and have come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24). Christ is with His people, and His kingdom has no expiration date.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† John 14:18-20, 23; Hebrews 9:28; Romans 13:11-12; Hebrews 10:36-37; 1 John 2:28; Colossians 1:27; Ephesians 1:13-14; Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:2-3

† Josephus; Eusebius

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