

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc, www.dtminc.org Today's Date: August 21, 2022

What the General Epistles Teach About Jesus' Return

by Dan Trygg

“...now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷And inasmuch as it is appointed for people to die once and after this the judgment, ²⁸so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”
Hebrews 9:26-28

“In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; ⁵but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead... ¹²Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”
1 Peter 4:4-5,12-13

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”
1 John 3:2

“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with scoffing... ⁴and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation...’ ⁷But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly people... ¹⁰...the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up... ¹²the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”
2 Peter 3:3,4,7,10,12-13

“Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, ¹⁵to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.’... ¹⁷But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁸that they were saying to you, ‘In the last time there will be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.’ ¹⁹These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. ²⁰But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”
Jude 1:14-15,17-21

“Therefore be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. ⁸You also be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord has drawn near. ⁹Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge has taken His stand before the doors! ¹⁰My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.”
James 5:7-10

As we have been assembling a broader understanding of the events to come at the end of the age, ...the *promises* to look forward to, and the *challenges* God has prophetically made known to us..., **one of the key themes has been the opposition of worldly powers, and people who are hostile to the gospel.** The saints will face difficulty, hostility, and persecution, both on the level of other people in general, and also from organized governmental leaders. This teaching goes back to Daniel's prophecies (the “little horn” and “abomination of desolation”), and is confirmed by the witness of other OT prophets. Jesus taught about this (Matt. 24:15), and the apostle Paul also specifically addressed this matter (“the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction” – 2 Thess. 2:3). **The apostle John introduces a new term for this.** It is both a spiritual influence that is at work in the world throughout the age, and it will be manifest in a person at the end, ...in someone John called “**the antichrist**” (1 Jn. 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 1:7), **We should not be discouraged. We are to be watchful, circumspect, and remain faithful to live for Christ, even during times of difficulty and persecution.**

So, we should not be surprised to see this same theme continued throughout “the general epistles”, ...the letters that occur in our NT after the letters of Paul, and continuing up to the book of Revelation, ...Hebrews, James, the letters of Peter, John and Jude. The teachings contained in these letters are consistent with what we have seen up until now. They speak of the coming of Jesus both in regard to the judgment upon the wicked (1 Pet. 4:4,5; 2 Pet. 3:7; Jude 1:14,15) and of the deliverance that will come to those who believe (Heb. 9:28; 12:26-28; Jas. 5:7-11; 1 Pet. 1:3-7,13; 4:13; 2 Pet. 3:13,14; 1 Jn. 2:25-29; 3:2; 4:16,17; Jude 1:20,21). There is a strong emphasis in these letters to be patient, to be strong, and to endure the hardship that will come upon those who are faithful Christ-followers during this time.

The writer to the Hebrews makes the comparison of death followed by judgment with the certainty of Jesus' return. He writes, “And inasmuch as it is reserved (‘laid away, stored-up’) to people to die once, but after this, judgment, *in the same way* also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sin of many, will appear (lit., ‘will be seen’) a second time, apart from sin, but to bring salvation to the ones eagerly awaiting Him” (9:27,28). Just as death certainly will be followed by judgment, the offering of Jesus will be followed by full salvation *when Jesus is visibly seen again.* **Note that the book of Hebrews clearly teaches that Jesus is coming a second time, ...and when He does, He will come visibly, and He will bring salvation to those who are eagerly awaiting Him, ...i.e., to believers.**

The apostle Peter agrees with this, as well. He says that our salvation inheritance is protected by the power of God, but it will be revealed in the last time, ...at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:4,5,7). Our hope is to be upon the grace brought to us at *that* time, ...*at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (1 Pet. 1:13). **If we have to endure suffering in this present time, we can continue to rejoice, knowing that at the revelation of His glory, we will celebrate with exceeding joy** (1 Pet. 4:13). When Jesus comes, He will come in glory. **That is when our hope will be fulfilled and our salvation will be made evident.** Peter also mentioned that faithful elder/shepherds will receive their reward, “an unfading crown of glory”, when He, the Chief Shepherd appears visibly (1 Pet. 5:4). The apostle John wrote that **when Jesus comes, we will see Him, ...and when we see Him, we will be made like Him** (1 Jn. 3:2). This teaching is consistent with what Paul had taught about the sanctification and glorification of the saints when Jesus returns (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:23).

Both Peter and Jude, the brother of Jesus, talk of how **there will be mockers in the last days. They will ridicule the belief in the coming of the Lord.** They ignore the reality that God made the world from nothing, simply by His word of creation. They also ignore the fact that Yahweh had destroyed the world once before, through the flood at the time of Noah. **God has the absolute power to bring it all to an end, any time He chooses. Then Peter emphasizes an important reality: This world is going to be destroyed** (2 Pet. 3:7-15; cf. Psa. 102:26; Zeph. 3:8). The prophet Isaiah had spoken of how the earth will be laid waste and despoiled. **Because the earth is polluted by its inhabitants, a curse will devour the land. The inhabitants will be burned, and few people will be left** (Isa. 24:1-6). Jesus had said that the heaven and earth would pass away (Matt. 24:35), which was echoed by the apostle John (1 Jn. 2:17). Jude points out that God will judge these mockers “at His coming with many thousands of His holy ones” (1:14). **Peter then adds that this world is being reserved for fire, kept for the judgment and destruction of ungodly people. The heavens will pass away with a great noise, the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up** (2 Pet. 3:7,10,12-13). But, Peter says, “**According to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells**” (3:13). This promise was prophesied by Isaiah, “I will create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa. 65:17), and, ““For just as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, will endure before Me,” declares Yahweh, ‘so will your offspring and your name endure”” (Isa. 66:22). **God will deal with the mockers.** What is important for us is to be building ourselves up in our faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep ourselves in the love of God, and be waiting expectantly for the mercy of the Lord (Jude 1:21). **We are to keep ourselves strong, growing and established in our faith.**

James, the brother of Jesus, likens Jesus’ return to the harvest (Jas. 5:7-11). **In Israel, there are two rainy seasons, the early rain, which happens in the fall, and the latter rain, which happens in the springtime.** The early rains offer relief from the long, hot summer, and they soften the ground in preparation for the planting of the winter crops. The early rains come at the beginning of the rainy season, usually in November, typically just after the Feast of Tabernacles. These rains are typically gentler, softer rains. If they were hard rains, most of the water would just run off the land, but these gentle fall rains soften the hard ground, which can then be worked and planted. The rainy season continues through the winter months, as the crops grow. Then, in the springtime, the latter rains come, usually from February to April, or even May. These are necessary for the maturing of the crops. They are also stronger, heavier rains, but they can be readily absorbed because of the crops on the land, and the receptiveness of the soil. **James tells us to be patient until the coming of the Lord. Just as the farmer waits patiently for the latter rain, and the maturation of the crop, so, too, we are to be patient, and strengthen our hearts.** The coming of the Lord is impending, ...it is ready, ...the Judge has taken His stand at the door. But He is waiting for the right time. **James directs our attention to the patient suffering of the prophets, and of Job, as examples of endurance. They saw the good outcome of the Lord’s dealings, ...that He is full of compassion and mercy.** The apostle Peter seems to agree with James’ assessment: **God is not slow about His promise, but is patient toward people, ...not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance** (2 Pet. 3:9). He is waiting for the crop to mature, ...for the harvest to be ready. This agrees with Jesus’ teaching that “this gospel of the kingdom must be preached as a sign to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). **If God is being patient with humanity, ...then we ought also to be patient, and also to be doing all we can to live effectively for Christ.** “What sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and devotedness, looking for and hastening the day of God (2 Pet. 3:11).

Again, we see that **the general epistles are consistent with the other scriptures.** There is no hidden return, ...just the return of Jesus visibly at the end, to punish evildoers and deliver the righteous. **We will be transformed to be like Him, when we see Him visibly come. This world is reserved for destruction, but God intends to create a new heaven and earth, in which there is nothing evil.** We look forward to abiding there with God forever. **Now, however, we must endure patiently the opposition of those who come against us. We are to do all we can to grow, and to become like Jesus in our faith and conduct, so that we can lead others to Christ during the time that remains.** God sets the time, and He is patiently waiting for the completion of the harvest to be ready and brought in before He comes.