

Tue, 28 Feb 2006

Inspiration and the Second Coming of Christ

Have you ever wondered why it is that two men can read the same passage of scripture and come up with two totally different interpretations? Or why two men can read the same Bible and yet see things so differently?

David Curtis

Two men who love God and yet see the same scripture in two different ways. Is it that one of them is stubborn or unreasonable? No, it is because each of us has within us paradigms of what life is really all about. The word paradigm means a model or a map. We look at life through our paradigms. Inside each of us is a map or model of what life ought to be like. Our paradigms are representations of life. We all have them, and we all have paradigms of eschatology. Eschatology is a word that frightens people, they don't understand it so they are afraid of it. When I talk about eschatology, I am not talking about the end of time, but the time of the end. There is a very large difference between those two ideas. Eschatology is the doctrine of last things but it is the last things of God's plan to redeem us, not the last things of planet earth.



We all interpret life through our paradigms. We look at life and compare it to our model to decide if life is good, bad, right or wrong. We interpret life through the model that we have developed within us. Most people don't question the models that they have developed, we all assume that we have the right model. Our paradigms are developed over a period of time and we see life through them. Our eschatological paradigms have been developed throughout our church life by what we have heard. The predominant eschatological paradigm of the church today is the late great planet earth exploding in a cataclysmic destruction of fire.

There is a thing called a paradigm shift which is when you view things one way and then you shift and view them another way. For example at one time most all men held the paradigm that the earth was flat. Then at a point in time men made a paradigm shift and began to believe that the earth was round. As another example: A man was on a subway in Long Island New York. As he was riding the subway, a gentleman got on the subway with three small children. The three children were about as rowdy as kids could get, they were bothering all the other passengers on the subway. The longer the man sat there and watched this the more irritated he got with the father of the children. Finally he couldn't take it any longer. He was so angry with the irresponsibility of the man that he couldn't contain it any longer. He said, "mister don't you think you should get a handle on your kids they're bothering everyone in the subway car." The man looked up and said, "I'm sorry, you're right, we just came from the hospital where their mother died and I don't know how to handle it and I guess they don't either. I'm sorry." The man's feelings were pulled inside out because what he thought was one way was in fact not that way at all. He experienced a paradigm shift. Paradigm shifts are in Scripture and they are part of your life and my life. Paul had a paradigm shift on the road to Damascus. He thought that Jesus Christ was a heretic and he was preaching against him. Then Paul met Jesus on that road and everything he believed about him was turned inside out. The person he preached against now became his life. That is a paradigm shift.

In the beginning weeks of 1997 I had a paradigm shift, my views on the second coming of Christ began to change. I have believed in a future second coming since I became a Christian in 1976. But in light of some very compelling Scriptural evidence I no longer believe that the second coming is future. Now listen carefully, I am not saying I don't believe in the second coming of Christ, I strongly believe in the second coming, but I believe it is past not future. To deny the fact of the second coming is to deny the inspiration of scripture. Do you agree? Well, I believe that the

time of the second coming is just as clear as the fact of the second coming. I believe that to deny the time statements that the Bible gives of the second coming is also to deny inspiration. Do you still agree?

Let me remind you of an Educational Study that I have shared with you several times.

In an educational study people were given a new concept (such as the earth is round, or the second coming has already happened) and asked to believe it, which resulted in them setting aside some things they already believe. It required a paradigm shift. This is very applicable to our study.

50% believed it immediately -- without thinking.

30% didn't believe it, immediately -- without thinking.

15% wanted to wait awhile while they make up their minds, but asked for no clarification and no further information.

5% analyzed all the details and finally came to a conclusion.

The results of the study go like this, It is estimated that 5% of the people think, 15% of the people think they think, and 80% of the people would rather die than think. I think that the Bereans in Acts 17 were among the 5% that think. They analyzed the details and came to a conclusion.

Acts 17:10-11 (NKJV) Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

The Bereans, "were more fair-minded" in that they: (1) "received the word with all readiness," (2) "searched the Scriptures daily," (3) apparently had the true spirit of open-mindedness for religious thought, and (4) in the spirit of truth sought to understand "whether these things were so" which Paul had spoken.

I am asking you to be one of the 5% that think, I am asking you to be a Berean, to search the Scriptures -- not to poll your friends, not to see what Church history says, not to search the commentaries, but to search the scriptures to see if these things are so. The cry of the reformation was "Sola Scriptura" -- the Scriptures alone! Anything that contradicts Scripture must be set aside and the Scriptures must be authoritative.

I want to remind you of something that you have heard me say over and over -- all theology must come from exegesis! Exegesis means to explain what the Scripture says. The Greek word has the idea of to draw out. We as believers need to hold a theological position, a paradigm if you will, we need a model or map to check out the things which we hear. But if your theological paradigm conflicts with the Scripture you need to modify your theology not the Scripture. Do you agree with that?

Now I know that most of you hold to a theological paradigm that says the second coming of Christ is yet future. What I would like to do is to get you to examine your paradigm in light of the inspired Word of God. I know that you believe in the second coming because the Bible teaches a second coming and you believe in inspiration. What I want to get you to realize is that the same Bible that teaches the second coming also teaches the time of the second coming. And to deny

either the fact or the time of the second coming is to deny the inspiration of the scripture. What does the inspired revelation teach us about the time of Christ's return? As we look at these Scriptures please examine your paradigm and see if it lines up with the Scripture. If it doesn't maybe you need to make a paradigm shift.

Matthew 16:27-28 (NKJV) "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. 28 "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."

Verse 27 clearly speaks of the second coming, He comes with the angels to reward every man. So far no problem, but look at the next verse. 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. Who are the "YOU" of this verse? Verse 24 tells us that Jesus is speaking to his disciples. So Jesus is saying to his disciples who were standing there that some of them would still be alive when He returned in the second coming.

Now some say he is talking about the transfiguration of 17:2 but that is only six days later and none of them had died in that six day period. Did he come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and reward each according to his works at the transfiguration? Of course not! How about Pentecost? No, that was only two months later and they were all still alive except Judas.

What are the possible explanations to this verse. I see only three, if you have others I would like to hear them. 1. There are still some of the disciples alive today. I don't think I could convince any of you of that one. 2. Jesus was confused or lying. I hope I could not convince any of you of that one. 3. Hang on! Jesus actually did what he said and came in the life time of his disciples. I would like to convince you all of this one. This seems like the simple and clear answer that holds to the inspiration of Scripture. Jesus did what he said he would do. I am very comfortable with that, how about you? Let me ask you a question, does Scripture contradict Scripture? No! The primary rule of hermeneutics (the science of biblical interpretation) is called the "analogy of faith." The analogy of faith is the rule that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. This means that no part of Scripture can be interpreted in such a way as to render it in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture. Another principle of hermeneutics is that the implicit -- that which is suggested though not plainly expressed: is to be interpreted by the explicit -- that which is clearly stated. I don't know how you see it but to me Matthew 16:27-28 is explicit!

If you are going to believe what Jesus is saying here, you are going to have to make a paradigm shift because the idea of Christ second coming being past is new to you. This idea might be new to you but this idea is nothing new to the disciples because Jesus had already told them that he would return in their lifetime.

Matthew 10:23 (NKJV) "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.

The liberal scholar and the unbeliever have a simple solution: Jesus was wrong about the time of His return. But those of us who take the Bible seriously must take Jesus at His word. The cities He referred to are long since buried under centuries of dirt. We must conclude that sometime in the first century this prophecy was fulfilled; Jesus has come. Jesus also told them that he would return to that generation.

Matthew 24:29-34 (NKJV) "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be

darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 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. 31 "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. 32 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 "So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near; at the doors! 34 "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

In verse 3 Jesus' disciples asked Him a question, His answer to the question is directed to His disciples. The "YOU" in the text is the disciples of the first century, not you in the twentieth century. Look at verse 33. As if to nail down this point Jesus set a time limit for the fulfillment of His prophecy -- "this generation." What generation did he mean? The simple answer is the one he was talking to. As we read the Bible we must keep in mind the hermeneutical principle of audience relevance which seeks to discover what the original audience understood a passage to mean. The concern of the evangelical interpreter is to understand the grammar of a passage in light of the historical circumstances and context of the original audience. Jesus said in verse 34, "Verily I say to you -- the people he was talking to; this generation -- your generation (a generation is basically a forty year period) will not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Jesus was telling them that all these things would happen in their lifetime.

The Bible was not written in 1997. We must always remember that the first-century Christians were the first believers to read the words of the New Testament, and we must seek to put ourselves in their shoes. What did these words mean to them? The Bible was written for us, but it was not written to us. It is not until we understand what it meant to them that we can apply its principles to us.

At our Lord's second coming he crushes Satan.

Romans 16:20 (NKJV) And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

The KJV uses the word "bruise" instead of "crush." The Greek word used here is *suntribo*, (soon-tree'-bo); it means to crush completely, i.e. to shatter (lit. or fig.):--break (in pieces).

When is it that Satan is to be crushed completely? It's at the second coming is it not? Paul said here to the Roman Christians that it would happen shortly. Remember, audience relevance. Do you think that the believers at Rome could have conceived of 2,000 plus years as shortly? If it was to be some 2,000 plus years how could he crush him under "their" feet? The people to whom this was written are dust now, they have no feet.

Let me say a word about this crushing of Satan. There is a lot of talk going around that I don't believe in Satan, that is not true, I believe in him, but what I believe is that he is a defeated foe. I believe this because I believe in inspiration.

Hebrews 2:14 (NKJV) Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

One of the aspects of Christ's earthly mission was to destroy the devil. The Greek word for destroy

is katargeo, (kat-arg-eh'-o) to be (render) entirely idle (useless), lit. or fig.:--abolish, cease, destroy, do away, become (make) of no (none, without) effect, bring (come) to nought, put away (down), vanish away, make void. Was Christ a failure in this mission??? Most Christians act like he was, they're still all worried about the devil. I think we want him to still be around so we have someone to blame for our sin. Many Christians have the Flip Wilson mentality -- "the devil made me do it."

1 John 3:8 (NKJV) He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

The Greek word for destroy is luo, (loo'-o) to "loosen" (lit. or fig.):--break (up), destroy, dissolve, (un-) loose, melt, put off. Christ is said to have destroyed the devil and his works. Do you believe the Bible? Or does your theology come from empiricism?

Colossians 2:15 (NKJV) Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

According to my Bible Satan is a defeated foe. You might ask what about all the evil in the world? If Satan is destroyed why do we still have so much sin and temptation? James says that every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Man is totally depraved, we battle the flesh, we battle evil men with corrupt world views, we battle the effects of sin. But Jesus Christ has conquered the Devil. Satan is not the god of this world, the Lord Jesus Christ is, Jesus is Lord.

Let's look at some other passages that give us the idea of Christ coming soon to the first century saints. Remember now that to deny either the fact or the time for the coming of the Lord is to deny the inspiration of scripture.

1 Corinthians 1:7-8 (NKJV) so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 7:29 (NKJV) But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none,

1 Corinthians 7:31 (NKJV) and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.

1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV) Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Paul is saying that the ends of the ages had come upon them, two thousand years ago. That age was the age in which Satan was the god of that world. His reign ended in 70 AD.

Philippians 1:6 (NKJV) being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

He doesn't say he'll perform it until they die, but until the return of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 (NKJV) so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV) Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If the Lord has still not come how could their body be preserved blameless, their bodies are dust. Let me remind you again of audience relevance as we read these next verses.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 (NKJV) since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How could this possibly be any comfort to them in their trouble if the Lord has still not returned? If the Lord is yet to come, this scripture meant nothing to them except maybe to give them false hope. Does God give us false hope?

1 Timothy 6:14 (NKJV) that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing,

Timothy was to keep the commandment not until death but until the coming of the Lord.

Hebrews 10:36-37 (NKJV) For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 37 "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

They were suffering and they needed to endure until he came to deliver them in a very little while.

James 5:7-9 (NKJV) Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

Again, here we have Christians who are suffering under the persecutions of the Jews and they are told to be patient until the coming of the Lord, in just 2,000 plus years the Lord would come and help them. I can't see how that would be much comfort to them. Let's say that you were suffering, your being persecuted for your faith. You have lost your job, your landlord is about to evict you, you have no food to feed your hungry family. You receive a letter from a rich relative who says hang brother I will be there soon to help. When would you expect him to come? He said soon, and you would look for him soon!

1 John 2:18 (NKJV) Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

Revelation 1:1 (NKJV) The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,

Revelation 1:3 (NKJV) Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Revelation 22:6-7 (NKJV) Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. 7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Revelation 22:10 (NKJV) And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.

Revelation 22:12 (NKJV) "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

Revelation 22:20 (NKJV) He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Keep in mind audience relevance which seeks to discover what the original audience understood a passage to mean. He said he was coming soon, His coming was seen as imminent. You cannot read the New Testament with out seeing the imminent expectation that they had for the return of Christ. The same event cannot be imminent at two different periods separated by nearly two thousand years.

Now someone will say, "yes, but one day is to the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day." That is what 2 Peter 3:8 says. In context it is simply saying that God is a God who keeps his promises. God is not bound by time but we are but God speaks to us in language that we understand. Though God is not bound by time he can tell time.

Don Preston in his tract "Can God tell time" give the following argument.

Numbers 24:17-18 (NKJV) "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult. 18 "And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, While Israel does valiantly.

Here Balaam the prophet made a prediction of Christ's coming. He says his coming is not now or not near. The coming of Christ was not at hand! It was over 1400 years away and that is a long time. Believers, if 1400 years is a long time could 2,000 plus years be soon?

In Daniel 10-12 is a vision encompassing a period of time from 536 BC to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD; about 600 years. Two times in this text Daniel was told "the appointed time is long" and "the vision refers to many days to come" (10:1,14). Remember, this vision was relayed to Daniel from God. While God is not bound by time, he was communicating to man who is bound to time. God called this 600 year period of time "long;" he said it involved "many days."

Daniel contains another important example of how God used time words. Chapter 8 contains a prophecy that extends from 530 BC to about 165-164 BC and the death of Antiochus Epiphanes. The time covered is about 365 years. How did God express the prophecy? Did he say it was at hand? Did he say SOME of it was at hand while some of it was for a long time off? No! God viewed the prophecy as a whole. He said the vision "refers to many days in the future" (8:26). Here is a prophecy that covers 365 years and God called it "a long time." Friends, if God called 365 years a long time, how can man say that time,

when God is speaking to man, means nothing?

This is an important question in light of the traditional interpretations of Revelation. Daniel was told to seal up his vision because the time for its fulfillment was a long time away--365 years. John was specifically told NOT TO SEAL UP HIS VISION BECAUSE WHAT HE SAW WAS AT HAND! John is told his vision, not part of his vision, was "at hand" and "must shortly come to pass!" Reader, did God call the 365 years for the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy a "long time" and call the fulfillment of Revelation, which most commentators say has not been fulfilled after 2000 years so far, "at hand?" To say the least, this would hardly be consistent!

Many do not realize the Bible gives an example of man attempting to change the meaning of time words used by God; and God's response.

In Ezekiel 7, God through Ezekiel said the Day of the Lord was at hand. The Day of the Lord in this context was when God used Babylon to punish Israel for her sin. This is the concept of the Day of the Lord; it is not an "end of time" idea. It is when God used a nation to punish another as it related to his chosen people.

In chapter 11 Israel responded to the threat of coming judgment. They insisted that although Ezekiel said it was at hand it was really not. It was time to build houses, not worry about judgment. One can almost hear some of those people: "Well, yes, Ezekiel has said the Day of the Lord is at hand, but after all, 'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day,' Psalms 90:4"

When Israel turned God's words of imminence into meaning-less-ness, God responded. In

Ezekiel 12:21-28 (NKJV) And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 22 "Son of man, what is this proverb that you people have about the land of Israel, which says, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision fails'? 23 "Tell them therefore, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel." But say to them, "The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. 24 "For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 "For I am the LORD. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it," says the Lord GOD.'" 26 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 27 "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off.' 28 "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done," says the Lord GOD.'"

Adonai told Ezekiel to tell Israel that her days of changing the time for his predictions were over. He had said judgment was at hand; Israel said it was not at hand. Jehovah would not tolerate it.

What we have then, is an example of man saying that while God had said something was imminent it really was not; it was for a long time off. We have God's response; when God said "at hand" he meant "at hand!" He did not mean hundreds or thousands of years; he meant "soon!"

Has God changed his vocabulary? Is it true that "at hand" once DID mean "at hand" but now it can mean "a long time?" If so, where is the evidence for the change? Surely, the honest student can clearly see there has been no such change in God's vocabulary. God can tell time; God can read a calendar. When God says something is at hand it is near. For man to argue otherwise is to reject the inspiration of the scriptures; it is to impugn the faithfulness of God; it is to impugn the ability

of God to communicate; it is to do the very thing Israel of old did and for which they were condemned! This is a very serious matter indeed!

Now I'm sure that your thinking if the Lord did come back in 70 AD how did we miss it for all these years. How could he have come back and we not have known it. The problem here is one of preconceived ideas. It is because of the paradigms that we have developed. We think that the second coming is an earth burning, heaven melting, globe changing event, so we assume it could not have already happened.

I submit to you that either Scripture is wrong about the time of the second coming and thus not inerrant or our paradigms are wrong about the nature of the second coming. Which one of those are you more comfortable with, an incorrect paradigm or an uninspired Scripture?

Obviously, from a physical perspective all this has not happened. But is it just possible that our view of the nature of the second coming is wrong?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 (NKJV) Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 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.

These are the same Thessalonians that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians 4 to.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (KJV) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

How is it that the Thessalonians thought that the second coming had already happened? If they viewed the nature of these things as literal how on earth could they have thought that they already happened? If their concept of the second coming was an earth burning, heaven melting, globe changing event how could they have thought it had already happened? If Paul was teaching the second coming as an earth burning, heaven melting, globe changing event all he would have had to say to the Thessalonians is "hello" look out your windows the earth is not on fire, the sky is still blue. Paul never corrects their idea of the nature of the second coming he simple says it has not happened yet. They must have viewed the nature of the second coming differently that we do.

Remember our hermeneutical principle that the implicit is to be interpreted by the explicit. The time statements are explicit and we must interpret what we don't understand in light of what we do understand. The Lord said clearly that he was going to return quickly why is it that we don't believe Him? We could believe him if we made a paradigm shift in our understanding of the nature of his return.