

# B.A.S.I.C.

*Brothers And Sisters In Christ*

## The SDA Church (Pt. 4) - 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming

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Concerning Christ's second coming a brief but detailed description of the SDA beliefs can be found online at <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/apocalypse/the-millennium-and-the-end-of-sin/article/go/0/the-millennium-and-the-end-of-sin/>. Rather than quote the whole article I've summarized it here.

1. Jesus returns, the wicked are destroyed, the righteous go to heaven, the earth therefore is left empty.
2. Satan and his angels are imprisoned in the abyss for 1,000 years.
3. After this literal 1,000 years, a literal city of God will descend from heaven and sit upon the earth.
4. At this point God will raise the dead unbelievers and they will make war on the city of God.
5. God will then destroy all who aren't in the city with fire, which will also destroy the earth.
6. God will make a new heavens and a new earth.

Most of the ideas which the SDA church teaches concerning the second coming of Christ they get from the book of Revelation and especially Revelation 20. Like many Baptist and Charismatic groups the

SDA church makes the mistake of taking these prophecies and visions literally. When they mistake the symbolic nature of Revelation for literal events and attempt to piece them together they end up with some rather strange ideas. As you can see above they teach that God will destroy all the wicked, but then he will raise them again just so that he can destroy them again. They also teach that the righteous will go to heaven but then they will have to come back to earth and endure once again war against the unbelievers. We will take a look at these false conceptions in three parts. First we will look at how the SDA like many others mistakenly take the book of Revelation too literally. Second we will take a brief look at the nature of God's kingdom. And finally we will see what the Bible really does say about Christ's second coming.

### **The Book of Revelation is mostly Symbolism**

#### **Literary devices**

One of the most important keys to correctly understand scripture is to remember that God chose to use human languages to reveal Himself to us. In His

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grace

and wisdom He did this so that the message of the glory of His Son could be preached to fallen men. We all know that the material one uses to build a house will greatly affect how you build it and what it will look like. If you use mud, bricks, wood or steel different rules apply as to how you can construct that building. The human language also has different building blocks for expressing ideas and truth; one can use parables, metaphors, prose, poetry, narrative and many other forms of literature. All these different forms are constructed differently and make use of different rules. Consider the following two sentences:

My wife is beautiful.

My wife shines like the sun.

Both sentences express the same idea. Both sentences are true. However the first does so with literal language. The second uses a simile and everyone who reads it knows immediately that the words “shine” and “sun” ought to be taken figuratively, because that is the nature of similes. My wife does not actually produce physical light equivalent to that which comes from the sun.

The Bible, because it uses human language, makes use of these same methods to express ideas. Sometimes it speaks literally and sometimes it speaks figuratively. Throughout history Christians who have failed to properly understand this have made many great mistakes. Some have insisted on reading the entire Bible figuratively. They therefore teach that historic events like creation and even the resurrection of Christ are merely symbols

or parables and didn’t really happen. Others have insisted on taking the entire Bible literally. Such a group once taught for example that the parable of the *Sower and the Seed* is an instruction on how farmers ought to plant, and therefore anyone who does not throw his seed like the farmer in Jesus’ parable is disobeying the will of God.

We often express this idea with the phrase “the Bible is a literary text.” This means exactly what we have been talking about. God uses human language to talk to humans. When using human language, God uses also the devices and forms of that language, including simile, metaphor, poetry, etc. When God uses a metaphor we ought to understand it figuratively, when God uses narrative we ought to understand it literally.

For more on properly understanding the Bible take a look at Pastor David Koenig’s essay, *The Fifteen Principles of Biblical Interpretation*: <http://lutheranmissions.org/essay/fifteen-principles-of-interpretation/>

## **Revelation is a prophetic vision**

Concerning the book of Revelation it is quite clear that it is largely a prophetic book. In Revelation chapters two and three John is told to write letters to the seven churches. These letters are not about the future but rather about the current churches. Therefore we might not call this part of Revelation prophetic. However immediately in chapter four we read:

**Come up here, and I will show you what**

**must take place after this. (Rev 4:1 ESV)**

That which follows from here on, is therefore prophetic, that is, it is a message about what will happen in the future.

The book of Revelation is also a vision. John tells us this immediately at the beginning of the book. Thus the book of Revelation is a *prophetic vision*.

*Prophetic visions  
are mostly  
symbolic.*

When we look at the nature of prophetic visions throughout the Bible we can quickly see that they are always largely symbolic. In Daniel chapter 2 we have the prophetic vision of the statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and iron mixed with clay. Daniel makes it very clear that this is not a literal statue but is *symbolic* of the kingdoms of this earth. Likewise the stone which crushes the statue is not a *literal* stone which will roll over the earth, but instead is Christ. Similarly in Daniel chapter eight we have a prophetic vision about a ram and a goat and a horn. That these things are all clearly symbolic is specifically told us by Daniel and by the Angel who comes to explain these symbolisms. Similarly we might take a look at Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and many others. We would see the same pattern again and again. Prophetic visions are mostly symbolic. This is true also concerning the book of Revelation.

There are many things in the book of Revelation itself that show that it is mostly symbolic. Jesus is alternatively described as a lamb, a lion, and a man sitting on a throne. Are we to think that Jesus literally appears as all three? Of course not, these things are symbols. In Revelation 7:4 the number of the believers is numbered at 144,000. Should we believe

therefore that only a literal 144,000 will go to heaven? Of course not, for just five verse later, practically in the same breath, John calls this same group of believers “a great multitude that *no one could number*.” It is quite clear from the context that the number 144,000 is symbolic. The 12 tribes of Israel times the 12 apostles times 1000 which is a full complete number equals 144,000. 144,000 is then symbolic of the full complete number of the Old Testament and New Testament believers.

**<sup>8</sup> and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup> And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, (Rev 20:8-9 ESV)**

In Revelation 20:8-9 we have this picture of the wicked making war on the city of God. Once again the SDA church takes this passage literally, a literal city and a literal physical war. Yet compare this passage to Psalm 2. The picture in Psalm 2 is almost exactly the same picture that is given in Revelation 20. The city of God sitting on a hill, the forces of men arrayed in battle against it, the triumph of Christ and of our God. Yet the writers of the New Testament make it clear that Psalm 2 was already fulfilled in Christ; see Acts 13, Hebrews 1, and Hebrews 5. If Psalm 2 is not speaking of a literal earthly city and a literal earthly mountain, then why should we think that Revelation 20 is doing so?

Revelation 20 is not speaking literally, but rather it is symbolic of the constant ongo-

ing spiritual war between God's people and the people of this world. And it is therefore of the greatest comfort to us, for we are clearly in the middle of this war even now. We can see this war all around us as the forces of this world grow ever bolder in their attacks on Christianity. Yet we know the end of this war and look forward in hope to our final victory through Christ Jesus our Lord.

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For a more in depth study on Revelation, read Pastor David Koenig's essay on Revelation. To find this essay go to <http://lutheranmissions.org/materials/essays/english/> and find the essay entitled *Revelation*.

## **God's Kingdom will never be a literal place on this earth**

The SDA church and many others like them not only fail to understand the largely symbolic nature of the book of Revelation, but they also fail to understand the meaning of the "Kingdom of God" and other similar phrases like the "Kingdom of Heaven."

This is nothing new. Misunderstandings concerning the true nature of God's Kingdom began with the Jews. A large part of the book of Matthew deals with this very subject, in which Christ over and over again attempts to explain to the Jewish people that His kingdom is not a physical anything. It is not a physical earthly city, it is not a physical earthly kingdom, and it is not a physical earthly race.

In fact one might argue that misunderstanding the kingdom of God goes all the way back to Eve. In Genesis 4:1 Eve gives

birth to Cain and says of him, "**I have acquired a man from the LORD.**" Many commentators believe that a better translation should be "**I have acquired a man, the LORD.**" If this is true it would show Eve's great faith in God's promise of sending a Messiah, but it would also show her misunderstanding concerning the nature of how and when that promise would be fulfilled.

Let us consider a few passages showing that Christ's kingdom is and will never be a physical kingdom on this earth and therefore this idea that the city of God will physically descend and sit upon mount Zion is wrong.

<sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (Joh 18:36 NKJ)

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Joh 3:3 NKJ)

<sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom 14:17 NKJ)

<sup>31</sup> "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. (Luk 21:31-32 NKJ)

<sup>20</sup> Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would

come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation;<sup>21</sup> "nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luk 17:20-21 NKJ)

In John 3:3 it is evident that Kingdom of God is spiritual for only those who are born spiritually can see it.

The passage in Luke has greatly confused many Christians over the years, largely because they do not understand the term "Kingdom of God." Now we are 2,000 years after Christ spoke these words, all those who were there and heard Him are long dead, yet we have seen no physical coming of God's Kingdom. How can Jesus say that "this generation will by no means pass away." This chapter is difficult and deserves an in-depth study if we are to properly understand it. For now, let us simply realize that God's kingdom is not a physical earthly kingdom but rather it is God's power at work, God's power through which He rules the world, God's power through which He creates faith in our hearts, God's power which works through the preaching of His word. All these things are continual and ongoing since Christ's first coming. Therefore the Kingdom of God is among us even now. We can see the Son of Man coming with power when He comes through the power of His word. Even right now the City of God, which is the church of God, sits upon His holy hill of Zion. This means that we the believers live in God's Kingdom when we place our faith and the foundation of our life upon the death and resurrection of Christ, who is Zion, and against this foundation the world and Satan fights but

*will not prevail.*

For more information concerning the nature of God's kingdom take a look at:

Pastor David Koenig's Essay, *The Kingdom of God*, <http://lutheranmissions.org/essay/the-kingdom-of-god/>

And this essay on the parables of Matthew 13: <http://lutheranmissions.org/essay/matthew-13-parables/>

## So What Will Happen when Christ Returns?

Christ will appear and all flesh will see him

Matthew 16:27; Matthew 24:30; Matthew 26:64; Revelation 1:7

All the dead, believers and unbelievers, will be raised from the dead

John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2

Those who were dead and the living will be judged by God

Matthew 13:49; Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31;

The believers will go with Jesus to heaven, the unbelievers will go with Satan and the evil angels to everlasting hell

Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 13:50; Mark 16:16

This universe and all that is within it will be destroyed with fire

2 Peter 3:10

A new heavens and a new earth will be created

2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65:17

*"For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."*

*Luke 17:21 NKJ*