

The Coming of the Son of Man from *the East*

Word of Acknowledgment:

I am indebted to Bryan Vanderhorst for pointing out the significance of “the east” in relation to the presence and glory of God. I also point out the fact that although he sees many of the connections made in this article, Mr. Vanderhorst does not agree with our overall conclusions, specifically the ultimate and eschatological fulfillment of the return of the glory of God through the Parousia of Christ in AD70.

In this week’s article, we demonstrate that the second coming of Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24 - *the coming of the Son of Man from the east* - meant (1) the return of the glory of God to the New Covenant temple, the Church, in fulfillment of Ezekiel 43, and (2) the re-establishment of the paradise of God among His people through the redemption of Christ, the last Adam. We begin with our key text in Matthew 24.

In the context of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age Parousia (Matthew 24:2-3,30-34), Jesus says the following:

Matthew 24:27

For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

To say that the coming of the Son of Man would be “*as the lightning (brightness) comes from the east and shines to the west*” means at least on one level, that the return of Jesus would be as the “rising of the sun”, as the “dawning of a new day”, and as the full arrival of the “true light” which conquers true darkness. In fact, there are several Old Testament prophecies which use this imagery and therefore find their ultimate fulfillment in either the first (the incarnation) or “second” (the Parousia) comings of Christ.

Christ as the Light of the New Creation

Under the inspiration of God, Balaam saw the both the inauguratory (incarnation) and consummatory (revelation) comings of Jesus, Israel’s (Jacob’s) “*star*” (light) and Messiah.

Numbers 24:16-17

The oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees *the vision of the Almighty*, falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered. *I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth.*

Nearly a millennia and a half later, both Matthew and Luke record that Balaam’s prophecy had begun to be fulfilled. The rising of *His star in the east* meant that God had visited His people to shine His light upon those who sit in darkness.

Matthew 2:1-2

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, *magi from the east* arrived in Jerusalem, saying, “*Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.*”

Luke 1:76-79

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, *because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, to shine upon those to sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Malachi prophesied that through the consummative and judgment-coming of Christ - the “*rising of the sun of righteousness*” - liberty and restoration would come to those who “fear My name”, the true people of God.

Malachi 3:1-2, 4:1-2

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And *the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple*; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. *But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?* For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.... For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, *the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.*

Concerning the imminent first century Parousia of Christ, Peter compares it to the dawning of a “new day” (the eternal Sabbath-Day of the Lord) in the lives (the hearts) of the people of God.

2 Peter 1:16-19

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales *when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased” - and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention *as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.*

Finally, according to the testimony of Jesus himself, he is *the light of the world* who through his return brings complete fulfillment to the prophecy of Balaam - He is *the star* from Jacob, through the lineage of king David.

Revelation 22:16

I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. *I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.*

The Presence of God Coming from the East

Yet on another level, the idea that the coming of the Son of Man would be “*as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west*”, is to invoke at least two significant biblical themes: (1) the return of the glory of God to His temple, and (2) the return of the people of God into the presence and paradise of God. The passages below highlight the significance of “*the east*” in bible prophecy, specifically as it relates to the glory and presence of God.

Eden (Paradise) Towards the East

Genesis 3:22-24

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever; therefore, the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; *and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.*

The Tabernacle and Temple Towards the East

Exodus 27:13-14

The width of the court on *the east side* shall be fifty cubits. The hangings for the *one side of the gate* shall be fifteen cubits with their three pillars and their three sockets.

Ezekiel 8:16

Then He brought me into *the inner court of the Lord's house*. And behold, *at the entrance to the temple of the Lord*, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men *with their backs to the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east*; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.

What these passages teach us is that the presence of God was towards "*the east*", and thus if man was ever to return to Eden (the Most Holy Place) he would need to enter from *the east*. With this in our minds, we turn to the prophet Ezekiel.

The Glory of God Departs and Returns to the Temple

In the early chapters of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet sees in a vision the glory of God depart from the temple just prior to its destruction by the Babylonians in 586BC. Later in the book, the prophet sees the return of the glory of God to a new and heavenly temple in a new and heavenly Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 10:3-4,18-19

Now the cherubim were standing on the right side of the temple when the man entered, and *the cloud filled the inner court*. Then *the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple*, and the temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord.... Then *the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple* and stood over the cherubim. When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; *and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them*.

Ezekiel 11:23

The glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city.

Ezekiel 43:1-2

Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; and behold, *the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east*. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.

The Glory of God Enters and Departs from the Temple

In the New Testament, we see a perfect parallel and in fact the fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision. First, we see Christ *as the glory of God* enter and leave the earthly Jerusalem temple prior to its destruction by Rome in AD70.

Luke 2:46-47

Then, after three days *they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions*. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

Matthew 21:12-13

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a robber's den.'" (See 22:1-14, 23:1-39 as parallel passages concerning the judgment of Jerusalem)

Matthew 24:1-3

Jesus came out of the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down. As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

The Return of the Glory (Presence) of God to the Temple

It is within this historical context that we find the promise of His coming again within the first century, *as the return of the glory of God to the true and heavenly temple, the Church, in fulfillment of Ezekiel 43.*

Matthew 24:27,30,34

For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.... And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, 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.... Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Thus, through the coming of Christ for the judgment of the Jews and the destruction of their temple made with hands, the glory of God fills the true and heavenly temple made without hands, the Church. Through the same earthly and historical event, *two* heavenly and eternal truths were revealed: (1) The glory of God had forever departed from the earthly temple of Judaism, and (2) the glory of God (His Presence) had returned from heaven to forever fill and dwell in the spiritual New Covenant temple, the Church, the body of Christ.

This promise of Jesus finds its ultimate expression in the book of Revelation, where John sees the "Revelation of Jesus Christ" where the Son of David is fully revealed as the glory of God *coming from the east* to take up His dwelling among His people. Notice how Ezekiel's vision of the return of the glory of God to His temple finds perfect parallels and thus perfect fulfillment in both the beginning and end of the book of Revelation.

Ezekiel 43:1-2 = Revelation 1:7

Ezekiel 43:1-2

"The he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory...."

Revelation 1:7,15

Behold, His is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.... His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

Ezekiel 43:4-7 = Revelation 21:1-5

Ezekiel 43:4-7

And *the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east. And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house. Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me. He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever..."*

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "*Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away. And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true.*

Conclusion

It is my conviction that Jesus' words; "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be" in Matthew 24:27 must be understood as the first century fulfillment of Ezekiel 43 and Revelation 21. The coming of Christ "from the east" meant (1) the return of the glory (the presence) of God to His true and heavenly New Covenant temple, the Church; and (2) that through the redemptive work of Christ *the last Adam*, the garden of Eden (the Most Holy Place) was once again accessible to man, that all those in Christ might dwell in the presence of their Creator forever. At the end of the Old Covenant age in AD70, Christ as the Glory and Presence of God returned *from the east* to tabernacle among His people forever. We have through the fulfillment of these prophecies been brought back into the garden of God where we eat from the Tree of Life and drink from the River of Life (Jesus) in the midst of the paradise of God.

Daniel Dery
November 10, 2019