

Bless, O My Soul, the Living God

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Bless, O my soul, the living God;
Call home thy thoughts that rove abroad,
Let all the pow'rs within me join
In work and worship so divine.

Bless, O my soul, the God of grace;
His favors claim thy highest praise;
Why should ungrateful silence hide
The blessings which his hands provide?

'Tis he, my soul, that sent his Son
To die for crimes which thou hast done;
He owns the ransom, and forgives
The hourly follies of our lives.

The vices of the mind he heals,
And cures the pains that nature feels—
Redeems the soul from hell, and saves
Our wasting life from threat'ning graves.

Our youth decay'd his pow'r repairs;
His mercy crowns our growing years;
He fills our store with ev'ry good,
And feeds our souls with heav'nly food.

He sees th' oppressor and th' opprest,
And often gives the suff'rer rest;
But will his justice more display
In the last great rewarding day.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

A Complex Event

Kevin T. Bauder

Sometimes the events of biblical prophecy are relatively simple. The foretold event occurs and the prophecy is fulfilled. From that moment, it slips into the past. Noah prophesies the flood, and it comes. Elijah prophesies a drought, and the rain stops. Micaiah prophesies the death of Ahab, and Ahab is killed. Even where the event takes time, it is a single, simple event.

Other times, the events of biblical prophecy are complex. In this case, *complex* does not necessarily mean *complicated*, but rather *consisting of multiple parts*. The most clearly complex event in biblical prophecy is the coming of the Messiah.

Arguably, the first messianic prophecy is about the seed of the woman who will bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). Jacob prophesied the coming of "Shiloh" of the line of Judah, from whom the scepter would not depart (Gen 49:10). Balaam foresaw a star coming out of Jacob and a scepter out of Israel, one whom he calls, "He that shall have dominion."

To these earlier foretellings, the later prophets added much detail. The coming Messiah would be a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15). He would be a king of David's line (2 Sam 7:11–16). He would be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:1, 4). He would rule the nations with a rod of iron (Ps 2:8–9). He would give His life for the iniquities of His people (Isa 53). Dozens more prophecies foretold the events of Messiah's birth, life, activities, death, and, according to 1 Corinthians 15:4, even His resurrection.

A new wrinkle was pressed into the messianic timeline by Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan 9:24–27). With this prophecy it became possible to know the exact year of Messiah's arrival hundreds of years in advance. What Daniel prophesied, however, was not Messiah's birth, but most likely His triumphal entry.

This wrinkle leads to the question of what exactly is meant by Messiah's coming. When should students of the Bible reckon that Messiah has come? At His birth? His baptism? His triumphal entry? Some other event?

In a certain sense, any of several events could be pointed to as the coming of Messiah. Indeed, in the fullest sense, Messiah has not come yet, for He is not



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yet exercising the fulness of royal sovereignty over the earth through Israel. Perhaps this factor is what Jesus' disciples had in mind when they asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" (Matt 24:3). Even though Messiah was right in front of them and was even talking with them, He had not yet come in the fulness of His power.

Jesus answers their question in a way that discloses even more about His coming. He refers to it in the future tense. He claims that it will occur only after a series of increasingly severe judgments. When it happens, it will be as unmistakable as the lightning flashing across the sky (Matt 24:27). It will culminate with the sign of the Son of Man in heaven (Matt 24:30). The grammar in that last statement probably includes a genitive of apposition: when the Son of Man appears in the heavens, He will be the sign.

By the end of the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus is going to leave earth and that He will return someday (John 14:1–3). At the beginning of Acts He bodily ascends into heaven (Acts 1:9–10), leaving many messianic prophecies to be fulfilled at His return. In other words, what the Old Testament speaks of as an event (the coming of Messiah) turns out to be a series of events and even a series of comings. Christians now speak without hesitation of Jesus' first coming, which is past, and His second coming, which is still future. What the Old Testament speaks about as a single thing—the coming of the Messiah—is thus a complex event.

What is true of Jesus' coming in general is also true of His second coming in particular. The second coming is also a complex event. The prophecies that remain to be fulfilled do not all take place at once. Some are fulfilled when He arrives on earth. Others are fulfilled when He establishes His millennial kingdom. Others will not be fulfilled until the end of the Millennium.

Dispensationalists insist that the coming of Jesus will occur in at least two stages. First, He will come in the air to rapture His Church. These Church saints will then live with Him for seven years in heaven, at which point they will accompany Him when He returns to earth to judge His enemies and establish His millennial kingdom. The coming in the air and the coming to earth are not really two separate comings, but two stages of the same second coming, which is a complex event.

That is why dispensationalists learn to be careful in the way they speak about the second coming. When they talk about this event, they may mean Jesus' coming in the air at the Rapture or they may mean Jesus' descent to earth to establish His kingdom. Sometimes they may mean both at once, preserving the complex nature of the event. Often, however, they find it necessary to specify which stage of the second coming they are talking about.

Anti-dispensationalists sometimes find this way of speaking humorous. They may jibe, "Do you mean the first second coming or the second second coming?" Viewing Jesus' coming as a complex event, however, means that

there is nothing implausible in the idea that the second coming occurs in stages. In fact, dispensationalists affirm that the Bible rather clearly shows these multiple stages. The second coming must be viewed as a complex event.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
