

JESUS WILL RETURN VISIBLY TO EARTH

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) seems to have been the first to propose that Jesus would return and rule “invisible to mortals.” In 1856, the Lutheran minister Joseph Seiss spoke of an invisible *parousia* or presence, followed by a visible manifestation. After Jesus had failed to visibly return in 1874 as expected by C.T. Russell his associate B.W. Keith directed Russell’s attention to the thought that Jesus must have returned invisibly. This was in line with the then newly popular two-stage view of Jesus’ coming as espoused by many denominations of the time. Later Russell changed the date of the return from 1874 to 1914. The invisible return teaching does not mean that Jesus has been literally but invisibly on the earth since 1914, but rather that in the teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses he still sits at God’s right hand in heaven and ‘comes’ in the sense that he **has turned his attention to** the executing of God’s judgements on the nations.

JESUS WAS ALREADY SPIRITUALLY PRESENT

- ❖ “I am **with you** all the days until the conclusion of the system of things” (*Matt. 28:20*).
- ❖ “I will not leave you bereaved. I am coming to you ... If anyone loves me, he will observe *my word*, and my Father will love him, and we **shall come to him** and make our abode with him”
(*John 14:18, 23*).

This was fulfilled when he sent “the spirit of the truth” (verse 17) which is “the spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7) which is also God’s spirit.

JESUS ALSO PROMISED TO LITERALLY RETURN

- ❖ “I will **come** (Gk *erchomai*) **again** and will take you to myself” (*John 14:3 ESV*). Or “I am **coming again** and will receive you home to myself” (NWT).

However, later Scriptures will show that this is not a promise to take them to heaven.

- ❖ “...hold fast what you have **until I come**” (*Rev. 2:25*).
- ❖ “For the Son of Man is destined to **come** [Gk *erchesthai*] **in the glory** of his Father with his angels”
(*Matt. 16:27*).
- ❖ “...the Son of Man...when he **arrives** in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (*Mark 8:38*).

Unlike Jesus’ spiritual presence his literal return would be visible because it would be “**in the glory of his Father**.” Such glory is only glory if it is seen. Also if a person says that he will return it usually means coming back to the place that he is about to leave. This is clearly the case with these sayings of Jesus.

JESUS IS ONLY IN HEAVEN FOR A CERTAIN TIME AS CHRISTIANS AWAIT HIS RETURN **FROM** HEAVEN

Contrary to the teaching that Jesus will never return to earth the Scriptures show that he will be in heaven only for a certain time:

- ❖ “...Jesus, whom heaven, indeed, must hold **until** the times of restoration of all things” (*Acts 3:21*).
- ❖ “...and to wait for his son **from** the heavens” (**1 Thess. 1:10**).
- ❖ “Our citizenship exists in the heavens **from** which place we are eagerly waiting for a saviour”
(*Phil. 3:20*).

Clearly Christians are waiting for his return as he said he literally would

HIS RETURN WILL BE IN PERSON

In spite of JW denial Jesus' visible personal return to earth is a very clearly stated teaching of the Scriptures:

- ❖ “And after he [*Jesus*] had said these things, while they were looking on, he was **lifted up** [*from the Mount of Olives vs. 12*] and **a cloud caught him up from their** [*the disciples*] **vision**. And as they were gazing into the sky while he was on his way, also, look! two men in white garments stood alongside them, and they said: “Men of Galilee, why do YOU stand looking into the sky? This Jesus who was received up from YOU into the sky *will come thus in the same manner as YOU have beheld (“viewed” KIT) him going into the sky*” (*Acts 1:9-11*).

Yet the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WBTS) teaches that the phrase “*in the same manner*” refers to the point where Jesus passes beyond the cloud and beyond **their vision** and therefore becomes invisible. But this is not what is said in verse 11. What the disciples saw was Jesus' initial physical ascent from the Mount of Olives and toward the cloud. His return will be “**as YOU have beheld (“viewed” KIT) him going into the sky,**” so that “*the same manner*” must mean: *as they physically saw him* so he will return and so it must involve a physical descent to the ground. In fact, Hebrews 9:28 even speaks of “...the second time that he **appears** (Gk *ophthesetai* = ‘made visible’ KIT)...”

In the teaching of the WBTS they mistakenly assume that in the Scriptures ‘clouds’ are figurative for invisibility. However, reputable Bible commentaries make it clear from the Scriptures that ‘clouds’ are figurative for God's presence (note the cloud in the Exodus experience and also the one which hovered over the tabernacle). So, as God's representative Jesus' being caught up in a cloud after “*he was lifted up*” pictures God's presence in him. Furthermore, verse 9 does not say that Jesus became invisible at this time, but simply that he went beyond “**their vision.**”

NOTE: the angels' question of: “why do YOU stand looking into the sky?” is asked for the purpose of encouraging the disciples to get on with accomplishing Jesus' mandate (vs. 8) of witnessing rather than peering into the now empty sky.

THE PROPHESED PHYSICAL RETURN

- ❖ “And his [*Jehovah's*] **feet** will actually **stand** in that day **upon the mountain of the olive trees**, which is in front of Jerusalem” (*Zech. 14:4*).

As Jehovah's representative it will be the feet of Jesus that once again stand on the Mount of Olives. Certainly he showed that he would be back on the earth at a future time by describing entirely physical, tangible conditions of his presence, such as:

- ❖ “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when **I drink** it new with you in the kingdom” (*Matt. 26:29*).
- ❖ “I make a covenant with you, just as my Father has made a covenant with me, for a kingdom, that you may **eat and drink at my table** in my **kingdom**, and sit on thrones to judge the 12 tribes of Israel” (*Luke 22:29, 30*). *See also Matthew 19:28.*

These are obviously descriptions of future physical events with a tangible Jesus' being in the Kingdom with his tangible disciples. “The idea of a Messianic banquet is reflected in verse 30” says *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, p. 1028.

JESUS COMES RIGHT BACK TO EARTH

1. When Jesus said in John 14:3 “*I will come again*” he could only have meant that he would come back to the place that he was going to leave, that is the earth, as a return from heaven in his case.

2. Also at the ascension of Jesus the angels told the apostles that Jesus would come in the same manner as they **saw him** depart. This means that it will be visible and back to where he ascended from, namely the earth (*Acts 1:11*).
3. Furthermore, the descent of Jesus described in 1Thessalonians 4:16-17 is shown to be a descent that is all the way to earth because the Greek noun *apantesis* used in verse 17 refers to a meeting for the purpose of being escorted. This is shown by the way the word is used in its two only other occurrences in the Christian Greek Scriptures:
 - When the wise virgins went out to meet the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1, 6) and, following the custom, escorted him by torchlight to the house for the wedding feast.
 - When the brothers in Rome travelled down to “the Forum of Apius” to escort Paul back to Rome (Acts 28:15, 16).

So 1Thessalonians 4:16-17 is not referring to a meeting with Jesus in the air so that he can take them to heaven; but rather so that they can escort him to earth to take up his rulership of earth.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Matthew 17:9 tells us that the transfiguration was a vision and therefore was a prophetic outline of a future event, that event being the glorious coming of God’s Kingdom. The fact that Moses and Elijah were shown with Jesus in the vision strongly indicates that when Moses and Elijah are **resurrected on this earth** that **Jesus will be with them** and will, therefore, also be on this earth. This also shows that the event will be at one particular time, that is at Jesus’ coming (Gk *parousia*). (Please see STUDY 4, JESUS CANNOT HAVE RETURNED IN 1914).

JESUS WARNED AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD TEACH AN INVISIBLE RETURN

- ❖ “...if people say to you...Look! He is in the *inner chambers*, do not believe it. For just **as the lightning** comes...so the presence (Gk *parousia*) of the Son of man will be” (*Matt. 24:26, 27*).

Lightning is a totally visible and dramatic feature in earth’s atmosphere and usually followed by loud claps of thunder. If Jesus says that he will be present like something so dramatically visible then we can hardly imagine that he means invisibly and silently. So those who promote an “in the inner chambers” i.e. hidden away concept are not to be believed. Please note that the Greek word of *parousia* for presence (or coming) is what will be “just **as the lightning** comes.” (*Also see Luke 17:24*).

JESUS’ BEING REVEALED AND MADE MANIFEST MEANS HE WILL BE VISIBLE TO HUMAN EYES

The WTBS teaches that Jesus’ *parousia* occurs invisibly and long before his revealing or manifestation, which is still invisible. So it is vital that we understand the meaning of all the relevant Greek words connected with his statements that he will return. The following Greek words used with reference to Jesus’ return and the following scriptures show that Jesus returns visibly and just once so that there is no two-stage ‘coming’ of Jesus.

THE GREEK WORDS ARE:

- Apokalypsis** = a revealing,
- Epiphania** = an appearing, a manifestation.
- Phaneroo** = to appear, to be manifested,

Ophthalmos = eye — Primarily of the physical organ of sight and therefore of literal sight.

Opsetai = to physically see.

*These are all accepted in normal English as terms concerned with **physical visibility**.*

Parousia = a coming to be present. There is nothing about this term that implies invisibility.

EXAMPLES OF THE USAGE OF THESE WORDS

It is rather obvious that, in physical terms, if something is physically ‘manifest’ or ‘is revealed’ then it is visible:

❖ “...*the flood*....the same way it will be on that day when the Son of man is **revealed** (*apokalyptetai*)” (Luke 17:27, 30).

The parallel account in Matthew 24 concerns the events of Jesus’ return where he speaks of how “they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away, so the presence (*parousia*) of the Son of man will be” So the two words of (*parousia*) and (*apokalypsis*) concern the same event when Jesus returns. Most importantly they both show him to be visible as we noted with the statements about his being like lightning, so that Christians are:

❖ “...waiting for **the revelation** (*apokalipsin*) of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:7).

❖ “...to you who suffer tribulation, relief along with us at the **revelation** (*apokalypsei*) of the Lord Jesus from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:7, 8).

❖ “...by the **manifestation** (*epiphaneia*) of his presence/**coming** (*parousia*)” (2Thess. 2:8).

❖ “...that you observe the commandment...until **the manifestation** (*appearing epiphaneias*) of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Tim. 6:14).

❖ “When he is made **manifest** (*appears phanerothe*)...at his presence/**coming** (*parousia*)”
(1 John 2:28).

❖ “When Christ is made **manifest** (*appears phanerothe*)” or as in NIV “When Christ appears...”
(Col. 3:4).

Phanerothe is the same Greek word as used for Jesus’ first manifestation or appearing which was visible and personal (1 Peter 1:20).

❖ “And when the chief shepherd has been made **manifest** (*appears phanerothentos*)...” (1 Peter 5:4).

❖ “...then they **will see** (*opsontai*) the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”
(Luke 21:27).

In the Scriptures clouds picture God’s presence (Exodus 33:9); also His coming in a war chariot (Psalm 104:3) – *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* p. 157. However, in the Scriptures clouds do not generally picture invisibility as the WBTS teaches.

❖ “He is coming with the clouds, and **every eye** (*ophthalmos*) **will see** (*opsetai*) him” (Rev. 1:7).

❖ “...the second time he **appears** (*ophthesetai* = ‘made visible’ KIT) to those eagerly awaiting him for salvation” (Heb. 9:28).

So it is very clear that if someone is coming to be present they will be visible, especially when the words used to describe how they will appear or be revealed show that it will be as visible as the lightning and everyone will see them. This is just how the return of Jesus is described. One would have to badly distort language in an attempt to understand all these terms any other way and so to produce an invisible return.

JESUS WILL RULE FROM A LITERAL JERUSALEM

“HEAVENLY JERUSALEM” IS NOT LOCATED IN HEAVEN

It is sometimes mistakenly thought that the word ‘heavenly’ refers to a location in heaven. However, because this word is an adjective it describes the quality of the subject, in this case, Jerusalem in the letter to the Hebrews:

- ❖ “But you **have come to** Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, *the heavenly Jerusalem*, to an innumerable company of **angels**, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, **to God** the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, **to Jesus** the Mediator of the new covenant...” (*Heb. 12:22-24*).
 - The verb phrase “**have come to**” shows this to be a present condition of Christians just as in Ephesians 1:3 and 2:6 where **Christians on earth** are seen as **being in heaven representatively** through their union with Christ.
 - The adjective *heavenly* is **qualitative** and has reference to things which are glorious because they originate with God. Hence “*the heavenly Jerusalem*,” means the glorious Jerusalem of the future situated on a literal Mount Zion.

So Christians on earth have figuratively approached this glorious city of the future *now - in the present*. *It is the city they desire as shown later by the writer to the Hebrews:*

- ❖ “But *now* they are reaching out for a better [place], that is, one belonging to heaven (“a **heavenly one**” UBS Interlinear). Hence God is not ashamed of them, to be called upon as their God, for he has **made a city** ready for them.” (*Heb. 11:16*).

This “heavenly better (place)” was called “the land of the promise” in Hebrews 11:9 and so speaks of Canaan restored. So the city prepared for them in God’s mind is a Jerusalem yet future:

- ❖ “For we do not have here a **city** that continues, *but we are earnestly seeking the one to come.*” (*Heb. 13:14*).

So these statements all refer to the future Jerusalem on earth, and Galatians 4:25 contrasts the “*Jerusalem today*” with the future Jerusalem as “the Jerusalem above” because it originates with God:

- ❖ “The *Jerusalem above* is free, and she is **our mother**” (*Gal. 4:26*). *Quoted from the LXX Psalm 86:5:*
 “A man shall say, Sion is **my mother**; and such a man was born in her.”
 “And of Zion it shall be said: ‘This one and that one were born in her.’” (*Hebrew Psalm 87:5*).

Men are not born in heaven. But this is a Messianic text and focuses on the future capital city of the Kingdom. It is “above” because it is vastly superior and originates with God. Yet figuratively the apostle John:

- ❖ “...saw also the holy city, New Jerusalem, **coming down** out of heaven **from** God and prepared as a bride” (*Rev. 21:2*).

There is no scriptural reason to understand this city as referring to anything other than the “heavenly Jerusalem” which originates from “above.” Richard N. Longenecker in the Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 41: Galatians states:

...The idea of a “**heavenly Jerusalem**” (“**the Jerusalem that is above**”) has a rich Jewish background...the realization of God’s reign in its totality. **As such, it is an eschatological concept that describes Jerusalem as it will be at the end of time**, often in contrast to what the city is at present...This concept of a “*heavenly*” or “*new*” Jerusalem also epitomized the hopes of Jewish Christians, as in Heb 11:10, 14–16; 12:22; 13:14; and Rev 3:12; 21:2, where the full realization of God’s kingdom and Christ’s reign is set out in terms of a “*heavenly*” or “*new*” Jerusalem that was looked forward to by the patriarchs and is now experienced by

Christians in inaugurated fashion. Since, therefore, **“the Jerusalem that is above”** is an eschatological term expressing a reality that will exist in the future, Paul’s use of it here for the experience of the Galatian believers implies that, as Paul understood matters, the Galatian believers had come into the eschatological situation of already participating in that **future reality**, in that the promise made to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ (cf. 3:16; 5:1).

JESUS WILL RULE ON DAVID’S LITERAL THRONE

- ❖ “The princely rule...**upon the throne of David** and upon his kingdom” (*Isa. 9:6, 7*).
- ❖ “God will give him the throne of David his father” (*Luke 1:32-35*).
- ❖ “God’s... oath that he would seat one from the fruitage of his [*David’s*] loins upon his throne” (*Acts 2:30*).

How can an intangible spirit qualify to be the seed of David? David’s throne is clearly one on earth.

JESUS WILL RULE IN ISRAEL

- ❖ “Are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this the time?” (*Acts 1:6*).
- ❖ “In the re-creation, when the Son of man sits down upon his glorious throne, you...will...sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (*Matt. 19:28*).

JESUS WILL RULE IN JERUSALEM - EARTH’S NEW CAPITAL CITY

- ❖ “And I saw and look the Lamb standing upon **the Mount Zion**...” (*Rev. 14:1*).

This last scene is on earth because the voice that John hears is **from** heaven. The parables of the Nobleman in Luke 19:11-27 and the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 both show that Jesus will return to where he left, namely the earth. Therefore the King and the Kingdom will be on earth (Isaiah 2:1-4). A normal reading of the following verses leads to the understanding that a literal city of Jerusalem is being spoken of in these verses:

- ❖ “I will be joyful in Jerusalem” (*Isa. 65:19*). *The setting here is of the New Heavens/Earth (v.17)*.
- ❖ “Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah and to her all the nations must be brought together to the name of Jehovah **at** Jerusalem” (*Jer. 3:17*).
- ❖ “Jerusalem will reside in security” (*Jer. 33:16*).
- ❖ “Jerusalem is the city of the great King” (*Matt. 5:35*).
- ❖ “Abraham was awaiting **the city** having real foundations” (*Heb. 11:8-10*).
- ❖ “...they are reaching out for a better place that is one belonging to heaven” (*Heb. 11:16*).

THE RULE OF JESUS WILL EXTEND OVER THE WHOLE EARTH

Concerning Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the image with a gold head (Nebuchadnezzar – Dan.2:38) as representing the Babylonian world power and which extends downward through future world powers and which is destroyed by a large stone, the prophet Daniel explains that:

- ❖ “The stone [*The King representing the kingdom*] struck the image at *its feet* (therefore on earth)...the stone became a large mountain and filled the *earth*” (*Dan. 2:34, 35, 44*).

So it is clear from this that “the stone” although originating with God hits the feet of the image which stand on earth and so has hit the earth. It is somewhat like a meteor strike which then spreads out over the land. In this case it, the kingdom, “filled the earth.” This shows that although originating with God the kingdom will be on earth. Similarly, Jesus showed that, at his return to earth his rulership will extend to all nations:

- ❖ “When the Son of Man **comes in all his glory**, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on **his glorious throne**. Before him will be gathered *all the nations*...” (*Matt. 25:31 ESV*).

Please note that there is no point Jesus being in glory if he and therefore his glory isn't seen! So he must be literally present which the following texts further show:

- ❖ “A king will reign and act with discretion and execute justice...*in the land*” (Jer. 23:5).
- ❖ “Let your Kingdom come. Let your will take place...*on earth*” (Matt. 6:10).
- ❖ “He will *rule*...to the ends of *the earth*” (Ps. 72:8).

NOTE: The NWT rendering of “have subjects” in Psalm 72:8 is incorrect because the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Septuagint have the Hebrew and Greek words for “rule.”

THE HOLY ONES RULE ON EARTH

The Greek phrase *epi tes ges* occurs 19 times in Revelation always for ‘upon the earth’ rather than ‘over the earth’ as in the NWT (Please see STUDY 23):

- ❖ “...and they are reigning **upon the earth**” (Rev. 5:10 KIT).

Kingdom of the heavens = Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:23, 24).

Please see STUDY 12 for fuller discussion

Although Matthew mainly uses the phrase “kingdom of the heavens” several comparisons show this means exactly the same as “Kingdom of God.” So the phrase has nothing to do with a supposed location in heaven but refers to a Kingdom created by God and on earth:

- ❖ “...Kingdom of the heavens belongs to them ... They will **inherit the earth**” (Matt. 5:3, 5).
- ❖ “...the kingdom...of the kingdoms **under** the whole heaven were given to the **holy ones**”
(Dan. 7:27).
- ❖ “...they marched over the breadth *of the earth* and encircled the camp of the **holy ones** and **the beloved city** (*centre of the Kingdom*)” (Rev. 20:9).

The holy ones here are not different from those mentioned in the rest of the Scriptures. The phrase simply means ‘God’s people.’ Clearly all holy ones will be on earth as the above scriptures show and so inherit “the earth.” If one inherits a property it is normal to live in it. In this case the inheritors of the earth do not lease or rent it to earth’s inhabitants but benefit by living on it.

THE PHYSICAL PRESENCE OF THOSE IN THE KINGDOM

- ❖ “...many will come from east and west to recline **at the table** with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob **in the kingdom** of the heavens” (Matt. 8:11).
- ❖ “I [*Jesus*] will not **drink** of this fruit of the vine **until** that day **when I drink it** new with you in the Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29).
- ❖ “I make a covenant with you, just as my Father has made a covenant with me, for a kingdom, that you may **eat and drink at my table** in my **kingdom**, and sit on thrones to judge the 12 tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29, 30). Also see Matthew 19:28.

These passages show the physicality of living in the Kingdom. There is nothing said anywhere in the Scriptures about an ‘earthly domain of the Kingdom’ as separate from a Kingdom in heaven. The Kingdom will be entirely on the earth

MISAPPLIED TEXTS

John 14:19:

“A little longer and the world will behold me no longer, but you will behold me because I live and you will live.”

This is no proof of a *parousia* (coming to be present) that is invisible to the world. Such a view would

contradict the many Scriptures showing a physical/literal return of Jesus. Really this means that the world would behold him no longer at that time until the *parousia* (Matt. 23:39) when he will be visible like lightning and when many will acknowledge him. And so to the Jews, Jesus said that they would see him in future on one condition:

- ❖ “You will by no means see me from henceforth **until** you say; blessed is he who comes...”
(Luke 13:35).

NOTE: John 14:18-23 concerns Jesus’ coming to his disciples **spiritually**: “I will not leave you bereaved. I am coming to you ... we [*God and Christ*] shall come (*spiritually*) to him [*the Christian*] and make our abode with him.” *This was fulfilled when he sent* “the spirit of the truth, which the world cannot receive” (verse 17).

CONCLUSION

So the teaching acquired by C.T. Russell of an invisible return of Christ, thought originally to have occurred in 1874 and later changed to 1914 is out of harmony with the details of the Scriptures. Sadly this belief is still held today by Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Bible Student groups that originated with Russell and they further promote the idea that Jesus will never literally return to earth. Almost no other groups or denominations hold such an unbiblical view. In STUDY 4 we will go into further detail as to why the two-stage view of Jesus’ coming is unscriptural.

SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURAL POINTS

JESUS ONLY REMAINS IN HEAVEN FOR A CERTAIN TIME

- ❖ “...Jesus, whom heaven, indeed, must hold **until** the times of restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21).

JESUS PROMISES TO LITERALLY RETURN

- ❖ “I will **come** (Gk *erchomai*) **again** and will take you to myself” (John 14:3 ESV).

JESUS’ RETURN IS IN VISIBLE GLORY

- ❖ “For the Son of Man is destined to **come** [Gk *erchesthai*] **in the glory** of his Father with his angels”
(Matt. 16:27).

JESUS WILL BE LITERALLY SEEN

- ❖ “This Jesus who was received up from YOU into the sky *will come* thus **in the same manner as** YOU have **beheld** (“**viewed**” *KIT*) **him going into the sky**” (Acts 1:9-11).

- ❖ “He is coming with the clouds, and **every eye** (Gk *ophthalmos*) **will see** (Gk *opsetai*) him”
(Rev. 1:7).

- ❖ “When he is made **manifest** (*appears* Gk. *phanerothe*)...at his presence/**coming** (Gk *parousia*)”
(1 John 2:28).

Epiphania = an appearing, a manifestation.

Phaneroo = to appear, to be manifested,

Ophthalmos = eye - Primarily of the physical organ of sight and therefore of literal sight.

Opsetai = to physically see.

*These are all accepted in normal English as terms concerned with literal **physical visibility**.*

By Raymond C. Faircloth

www.biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk