

CHRIST'S THREE APPEARINGS

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

By Arlen L. Chirwood

Within the framework of that which is revealed in Scripture concerning Christ's complete work on man's behalf — beginning at Calvary and culminating in events surrounding His return — the writer of Hebrews refers to three separate and distinct appearances of Christ in connection with *salvation*. One appearance is *past*, one is *present*, and one is *future*.

These three appearances have been recorded together within the same context near the end of the ninth chapter. And these appearances, in keeping with the previously announced work of the Son — pertaining to bringing “many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10) — provide the proper interrelationship between the Lord's work as *Prophet (past)*, His work as *Priest (present)*, and His work as *King (future)*.

Past Appearance

“...but now once in the end of the world [*'ages'*] *hath he appeared* to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26b).

Unredeemed man is *dead* in trespasses and sins. He is alienated from God. Redeemed man though has been made *alive*, and a right relationship with God has been *restored* (Eph. 2:1-7; Col. 2:13-15).

And this has been accomplished *solely* through the finished work of the Redeemer, promised in Gen. 3:15 immediately following man's fall.

At the time Adam fell, “death passed upon all men.” This included Adam and all his descendants, even though his descendants had neither been born nor would sin “after the similitude of Adam's transgression” (Rom. 5:12-14). Consequently, *all* have sinned; and the penalty for sin, established in Eden, is *death* (*cf.* Gen. 2:17; Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 6:23).

In order to bring man back into a right relationship with God, the Redeemer *must* pay sin's penalty. The Redeemer *must* die on man's behalf. This is the reason God sent His Son “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,” bearing “the sins of many” (Heb. 9:26-28).

“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3; *cf.* I Cor. 3:2). As in the words of the song, “Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe...” His finished work of redemption leaves nothing for man to do, *simply because there is nothing which man can do*.

Aside from being spiritually dead and alienated from God, unredeemed man is presented in Scripture as *a ruined creation*; and the pattern concerning how God begins and carries out His work relating to the restoration of a ruined creation *has forever been set forth in the opening verses of Genesis*:

“...darkness was upon the face of the deep [Heb., *tehom*, referring to surging, raging waters covering the entire ruined creation]. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light, and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness” (Gen. 1:2b-4; *cf.* John 1:5; II Cor. 4:6).

All work, resulting in restoration in this passage, was accomplished entirely through Divine intervention, setting forth *an unchangeable pattern* concerning how God restores a ruined creation. And,

accordingly, man, a subsequent ruined creation, *must be restored after the established pattern*.

All the work has already been accomplished by man's Redeemer. Man, relative to this work, can only be completely passive. He can do no more than simply receive that which Christ has already accomplished on his behalf (Acts 16:30, 31).

Present Appearance

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, *now to appear* in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24).

During the period between the time of *His departure* to receive the kingdom and the time of *His return* in possession of the kingdom (Luke 19:11-27), Christ is not only seated at the right hand of the Father (Heb. 1:13), but He is also exercising a high priestly ministry in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 4:14-16). He is seated at the right hand of the Father, awaiting that day when His enemies will be made His footstool, anticipating receiving the kingdom from the Father (Dan. 7:13, 14; *cf.* Rev. 11:15); and He is exercising the office of *High Priest* in order to effect *a present cleansing* for those comprising the “one new man” *in Christ*, anticipating one day bringing forth a “glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing...” (Eph. 5:26, 27; Heb. 1:13; I John 1:6-9).

Christ presently ministers in the Holy of Holies on the basis of His shed blood. This blood was shed at Calvary to provide *redemption* for fallen man, and this same blood is presently on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly sanctuary to provide *a present cleansing* for the redeemed. Saved man, still possessing the old sin nature and residing in a body of death, is ever subject to defilement during his present pilgrim walk, necessitating continual cleansing.

God provided a means of cleansing for His people during Old Testament days, and He has done the same today.

The Old Testament priests were provided with a brazen laver, containing upper and lower basins filled with water, to wash their hands and feet as they ministered on behalf of the people between the brazen altar and the Holy Place; and blood sacrifices were offered by the priests daily and by the high priest on the day of atonement to provide a cleansing for those who had previously appropriated the blood of the slain paschal lambs (Heb. 7:27; 9:6, 7, 22).

New Testament priests though have been provided with a past Sacrifice, with no additional sacrifice ever again necessary. It is “a new and living way” — being “washed with pure water” — to effect cleansing for those who have, as in the type, previously appropriated the blood of the slain Passover Lamb (Heb. 7:27; 10:12-22).

Christ’s past ministry as *Prophet* makes possible His present ministry as *Priest*, and both ministries look out ahead to the same thing — Christ’s future ministry as *King*.

One day Christ will terminate His present ministry as High Priest and come forth from the Holy of Holies, first to reckon with those whom He has redeemed and for whom He presently ministers, and then to reign over the earth with the “many sons” whom He will have brought unto glory.

Future Appearance

“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him *shall He appear* the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28).

Man was created to have dominion; but he fell, bringing about his disqualification. And redemption is with a view to allowing redeemed man to ultimately occupy the position from which he fell.

Christ’s *past appearance* to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, His *present appearance* in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf, and His *future appearance* in all His glory are so intimately related that one cannot be separated from the other.

In relation to these three appearances:

1) *We have been saved (based on Christ’s past, finished work).*

2) *We are being saved (based on Christ’s present, continuing work, which His past work makes possible).*

3) *We are about to be saved (a future work of Christ, which His past two works will have made possible).*

That is to say, the three appearances of Christ are connected with these three aspects of salvation:

1) *Past (Eph. 2:8, 9; Heb. 9:26b).*

2) *Present (I Cor. 1:18; Heb. 9:24).*

3) *Future (Heb. 1:14; 9:28).*

Once an individual has been saved (past, through the finished work of Christ at Calvary), that individual is then dealt with on an entirely different plane. He is then dealt with concerning a present aspect of salvation (on the basis of Christ’s past work at Calvary, but connected with His present work in the heavenly sanctuary); and this is with a view to the present aspect of salvation being brought to fruition and realized at a future time (at the time of Christ’s return).

The past aspect of salvation has to do with man’s *spirit*. Man is a tripartite being comprised of spirit, soul, and body; and each of these three parts of man, within God’s economy, is subject to salvation at different times.

When man sinned in Eden, he died, just as God had decreed (Gen. 2:17). Since his body continued to live, and his soul — the life-giving principle in the blood (Lev. 17:11) — also continued to live, it is evident that man experienced *a spiritual death*, with this spiritual death resulting in *a subsequent physical death* at a later time.

Unredeemed man today, possessing an unredeemed body housing an unredeemed soul, is *spiritually dead*. He is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1, 5), and life must be imparted before present and future aspects of salvation can come into view. The person must pass “from death unto life” (John 5:24).

The present and future aspects of salvation have to do with man’s *soul*. And only those who have been made alive spiritually (realizing the salvation of their spirits) can enter into the things associated with the salvation of the soul. Then, and only then, does the salvation of the *soul* come into view.

Man’s *soul* is in the process of being saved, and this salvation will be brought to completion at the time Christ returns and effects the redemption of man’s body (Rom. 8:18-23). The saving of the soul, during the present time, is inseparably connected with the *life* which one lives after he has passed “from death unto life.” This is the salvation referred to in connection with Christ’s return in Heb. 9:28, to be realized by those who “look for him [faithful servants in the house, awaiting the Householder’s return].”

Hebrews is a book dealing with the *salvation of the soul*; and Christ, Who was “once offered to bear the sins of many [effecting the salvation of the *spirit*]” is going to appear the “second time without sin unto salvation [to effect the salvation of the *soul*].”

To deal with Christ’s first coming apart from His second coming is *utter folly*. To proclaim the message concerning Christ’s past work apart from the subsequent message concerning Christ’s present and future work can only lead to *spiritual disaster* in the Christian life.

Christ appeared once “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,” He now appears “in the presence of God for us,” and one day He will “appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

These three appearances comprise an *indivisible unit intimately related to man ultimately being brought back into the position for which he was created in the beginning*.

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