

The 'comings' of Jesus Christ

Stephen Hughes

This article provides some general comments regarding points raised by Brother Ted Bailey in his letter "[Did Jesus come in A.D. 70?](#)" (Nov. 2004, p. 419).¹

THE VIEW expressed by Brother Ted Bailey, backed up by a quotation from Brother Thomas, is that there are three comings of Jesus: his ministry; A.D. 70; and his return to establish the Kingdom. Of these, two are actual appearances, the first and the third. Brother Thomas cites Isaiah 40:1-5 as referring to the three comings of Jesus, but this is difficult to see. This passage is quoted in Luke 3:4-6 in connection with the preaching of John the Baptist, which suggests that it is a prophecy of the first coming of Jesus.

The point I made in my original article was that it is more natural to think of the coming of Jesus in A.D. 70 as a 'virtual' coming,² a third coming to inspect the temple in Jerusalem, the first two having occurred at the beginning and end respectively of Jesus's ministry ([see below](#)). We then have three inspections of the temple, two physical and one virtual, and two comings of Jesus, the first in his ministry on the earth and the second when he returns to establish the Kingdom of God.

The reason for calling Jesus's involvement in A.D. 70 a virtual coming is that Scripture is clear that there are only two physical comings. For example, we read in Hebrews 9:28: "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". Also there are the words of the angel when Jesus ascended to heaven: "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). There does not seem to be scope here for any other physical coming between the first and second advents.

Other comings

We read in the Apocalypse of two other 'comings' of Jesus in relation to two ecclesias in Asia Minor. The first concerns the ecclesia at Pergamos: "Repent; or else I will *come* unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (2:16). The second concerns the ecclesia

at Sardis: "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will *come* on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will *come* upon thee" (3:3). Since these two ecclesias are now no longer there, presumably they *were* visited by Jesus. Even if the two ecclesias came to an end for some other reason, at least there was the possibility of a coming of Jesus. Personally, I think that we should think of these comings, if they occurred, as virtual comings, as was the case in A.D. 70.

Another coming is referred to in Matthew 18:20, where Jesus says: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them". Whatever our interpretation of this verse, it is clear that it involves Jesus having some sort of presence here on the earth. Again, I personally believe that this is a virtual presence rather than a real, physical presence.

The meaning of the Greek word *parousia* is cited as evidence for an invisible coming of Jesus in A.D. 70. However, a study of the use of *parousia* in the New Testament does not reveal any passage where there is an obvious application to an invisible presence. The word *parousia* occurs in passages cited as referring to Jesus coming in A.D. 70, for example 2 Peter 3:4. Since an invisible coming of Jesus is assumed it is also assumed that the word *parousia* can mean an invisible presence. This is a circular argument. Also, it is often pointed out that, in Greek writings of the first century A.D., *parousia* could refer to the presence of a king. No doubt this was the case. However, we should be careful in using this meaning in interpreting Scripture since it cannot be shown that it definitely has this meaning in any passage of Scripture.

1. Prior to the publishing of this letter, the discussion of this subject began with the second article in Brother Hughes series "The Olivet Prophecy", in a section entitled, "[Did Jesus come in A.D. 70?](#)" (Jul. 2004, p. 290), and continued with an exchange between another reader and Brother Hughes in September 2004 (p. 348). In view of the considerable space devoted to the subject, both recently and during the period September 2001 to March 2002, it is not proposed to devote any further space to the matter unless new points are made.—T.B.
2. 'Virtual' is defined as "having the essence or effect but not the appearance or form of" (*Collins English Dictionary*).

James 5 and 2 Peter 3

James 5:7,8 and 2 Peter 3:12 are sometimes interpreted as referring to a coming of Jesus in A.D. 70, but I cannot see how this can be so.

James wrote his epistle to Jews who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire prior to A.D. 70 (1:1). He says: "Be ye . . . patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door" (5:8,9). The phrase "the judge standeth before the door" is cited as evidence that Jesus was about to come in A.D. 70. However, the brethren and sisters whom James was addressing were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire and remote from Jerusalem. Why should they be "patient" and "stablish [their] hearts" in readiness for the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70? In what way would they be condemned by the judge when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70? These versus make far more sense if applied to the return of Jesus.

A very pertinent question is, Would brethren and sisters at this time construe these passages to mean that Jesus was about to come and destroy the Jewish state, or would they take them to mean that Jesus was coming soon to establish God's Kingdom on the earth? I think it would be the latter.

Another interesting question is, How would Bible students of the first century A.D. have interpreted the events of A.D. 70? We might think that this is a hypothetical question. It is not really so, as we know the Scriptural passages available to our brethren and sisters of that time. They would probably have made a connection between the events of A.D. 70 and Deuteronomy 28. For example, they may well have connected the "yoke of iron" of verse 48 with the iron legs of Nebuchadnezzar's image. From Daniel 2 they would have known that the Roman Empire was the iron part of the image, and associated the eagle of Deuteronomy 28:49 with the symbol of the Roman army.

When James wrote his epistle the Gospel records would have been in existence, and therefore it is highly likely that they would have perceived that the events of A.D. 70 were described in the first half of Luke 21:24: "And they [the Jews in the Land] shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations . . .". They would then have looked for the fulfilment of the second half of the verse: ". . . and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the

Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". At that time they did not know how long this was going to be; no doubt they were hoping that the treading down was going to last for only a few weeks, or a few years at most.

The epistles of Peter are similar to James's epistle in that they too were written to believers in the Roman Empire (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 3:1). Would the saints have connected the "day of the Lord" in 2 Peter 3:10 to the events of A.D. 70, or would they have connected them to the return of Jesus to the earth? Since they were living in the Roman Empire outside the Land, I believe they would have understood the heavens and the earth to be those of the Roman Empire. After all, Israel was not a separate nation state at this time. In the language of Peter, it was not an independent "heaven"; rather at this time the Jewish "earth" existed under the Roman "heaven".

The "heavens" and "earth" of 2 Peter 3:10 were "dissolved" to make way for "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (vv. 11,13). This did not happen in A.D. 70. The Jewish "earth" disappeared but the Roman "heavens" remained. In verse 14, Peter exhorts the brethren and sisters to "be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless". The reason for this must surely be to be ready for the return of Jesus rather than for the destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 70. In 2 Peter 3:3,4 we read of scoffers in the last days saying, "Where is the promise of his coming [*parousia*]?" Did people scoff at a promised coming in A.D. 70?

A.D. 70 not a physical coming

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the reasons I put forward earlier for a 'virtual' coming of Jesus in A.D. 70, rather than a physical, albeit invisible, one:

- 1 Under the Law a priest inspected a leprous house up to three times. If on a third inspection the house was still infected with leprosy it was to be pulled down and the stones dumped outside the city (Lev. 14:33-45). In analogy, Jesus inspected the house of Israel on two occasions during his ministry, and on both occasions was compelled to overturn the tables of the money changers and drive out the animals on sale for the sacrifices. On Jesus's third inspection, the house of Israel was still leprous and therefore the stones of the house were removed and 'dumped' out in the nations.

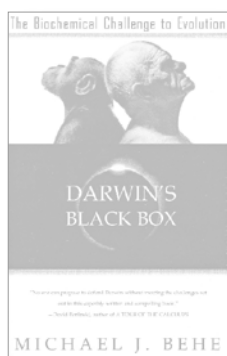
2 In Daniel 9:26 we read: "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary". The Messiah of this verse is Jesus, and the "people of the prince" the Roman army. Therefore Messiah appears to own the Roman army in some way. This would have to be in a virtual sense. We can be certain that the Roman army had no idea that Jesus was in control of events. Even if Jesus was physically

present in A.D. 70, he was invisible, which is not the same as a normal physical presence anyway.

3 God has put the affairs of the world under the control of Jesus, as we read in 1 Peter 3:21,22: ". . . Jesus Christ: who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him". This would include control of the Roman armies in A.D. 70 with the help of the angels.

A scientist challenges evolution

Malcolm Edwards



Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution.

Michael J. Behe (1996), Touchstone, 1998.

Previously reviewed by David Burges in March 2000, p. 93.

matter is very much more complex than most people realise. For Darwinian evolution to be convincing it must be shown to have happened, or be happening, at the molecular level, and the author demonstrates convincingly that in this regard it always falls down.

He defines the 'Black Box' of the title as "a whimsical term for a device that does something but whose inner workings are mysterious". He uses the illustration of a computer, which many people use but have not the slightest idea of how it works.

THE AUTHOR of this book is a professor of biochemistry, who does not write especially as a creationist, but as one who is convinced from his own studies that intelligent design is behind life on this planet. The reviewers' comments on the back cover speak for themselves:

- An overwhelming case against Darwin on the biochemical level
- The most thorough and clever presentation of the design argument that I have ever seen
- A well-written and thoughtful statement on the biochemical challenge
- A valuable critique of an all-too-often unchallenged orthodoxy.

The work is not too technical for the average layman, especially since the writer uses many analogies to explain some of the tricky terminology and complex processes in his field of study. The value of the work to creationists is that he repeatedly demonstrates that Darwin's step-by-step theory of natural selection, which is accepted by most biologists and geologists, cannot explain the microscopic world of biochemistry, where

No small jumps

The greatest black box of all is how life itself actually works. How does an eye see? How does blood clot? How do antibodies operate? Darwin could not answer any of these questions. In questioning the Darwinian theory, the author remarks: "With the advent of modern biochemistry we are now able to look at the rock-bottom level of life. We can now make informed evaluation of whether the small steps required to produce large evolutionary changes can ever get small enough". Thus he continues that on such a microscopic scale unbridgeable chasms occur.

The author's simplified explanation of the biochemistry of vision is where the layman is likely to get lost, yet even a rudimentary understanding of the process is sufficient to show the impossibility of such a complicated, yet amazing, interactive system evolving randomly. He comments: "Each of the anatomical steps and structures that Darwin thought were so simple involved 'staggeringly complicated' biochemical processes that cannot be papered over with rhetoric".