

OpenTheo

Is It Possible Jesus Has Already Come?

November 20, 2023



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether it's possible Jesus has already come in a fashion similar to Elijah coming as John the Baptist, whether Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who was wrong about the kingdom coming in his disciples' lifetime, and what part Jesus' resurrection plays in salvation.

* Is it possible Jesus has already come in a fashion similar to Elijah coming as John the Baptist?

* What are the arguments opposing the current view of New Testament scholars that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who was ultimately wrong about the kingdom coming within his disciples' lifetime?

* What part does Jesus' resurrection play in salvation?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Cogle and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag STRask podcasts. As you are.

Welcome, Greg. Alright, let's start with a question from Asif. Is it possible that Jesus has already come in a similar fashion as Elijah came as John the Baptist? A Muslim sect, the Ahmadis, has this kind of belief? Well, I guess, you know, to be most charitable, anything that's possible is possible.

But I remember JP, whoops, I remember JP Moreland saying many years ago to someone who was being, taking a critical position of something he said, well, isn't it possible this alternate view that he was offering? And he said, just because it's possible doesn't mean it's reasonable to believe it's the case. It's a great response and something we ought to always hang on to. Just about anything is possible.

Anything as possible as possible. If that's the question, is it possible? I guess so. Is it possible Jesus is an alien from another planet who's posing as God? I don't know.

I guess so. But there's no good reason to believe that's the case. What you have to go with is the odds on favorite.

It seems to me if you're going to be reasonable. So what would be the reason that Jesus has come in two different periods of time? We know scripturally that John the Baptist, though it's not even clear. It doesn't seem to be claiming that in the case of John the Baptist that he came before and he's coming again.

It's not the same individual. Okay. But there certainly is a, a kind of type ology, John the Baptist that Elijah is coming and John the Baptist is Elijah, kind of.

The individual that's reincarnated is John. He's like Elijah and we see some characterizations and there's going to be a Elijah that comes in the future, kind of. But that's a typology.

It's not a reincarnation or a re-manifestation. Now, there's a lot of reason to believe that in a sense Jesus showed up at other times. These are called Christophanes.

That is when God presents himself present in some tangible physical form. So when we see the Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the book of Daniel in the fiery furnace, there's another individual that looks like a divine figure that's in there with them. It's a pretty good guess that that's a Christophany that is the second person of the Trinity that's manifesting himself in, in that circumstance.

So in that sense, I think in a certain sense, Jesus, Jesus is the name given to the person who is born on Christmas. You know, that's a name referring to his physical self. Okay.

Now, sometimes we're not really careful about that. We say, well, Jesus showed up in the Old Testament this way. Well, strictly speaking, if we want to be precise, it wasn't Jesus yet.

It was the word that became flesh later that showed up in a Christophany manifestation of God or theophany would be another way of putting it. But Christophany focuses on this manifestation of the second person of the Trinity. And some would argue that all of the times where God shows up to speak, burning bush, oaks of mammary with Abraham in the furnace there with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, those were all actually the word, the person who communicates, the person of God who communicates manifesting himself in some physical form.

However, Jesus was an incarnation that is the word became flesh, took on to himself an actual human body, not just the form or image or manifestation that we see in the Old Testament, burning bush, looking like a human at the oaks of mammary, et cetera, et cetera. So there is a sense that, arguably Jesus showed up in the past, but not as an incarnation. The incarnation was unique.

And it's not really even parallel to John the Baptist and Elijah, because John the Baptist and Elijah are two distinct historical figures that were similar to each other. And this is why Jesus could say, well, Elijah has shown up if you care to accept it, referring to John the Baptist. That there was a typology or a similarity there, but it does appear that Elijah in some fashion will show up in the book of Revelation, which I think is Revelation 11, the two witnesses or something.

But that's interpretive, may not be the case, but so there are distinctions here. I would not say that there's any good reason to believe that the word showed up, the second person of the Trinity, showed up in the flesh incarnate prior to the time of Jesus of Nazareth. And I don't know why anybody had the reason to think so.

Well, you're talking about prior to, I think he's talking about after. So he's already come, I would assume they're talking about the second coming here. Do you have any? Could you read it again? Is it possible that Jesus has already come in a similar fashion as Elijah came as John the Baptist? So I assume that's talking about the second coming.

Well, it's unclear, but yeah. Okay, pretty much my same. No, I guess I don't have any.

Let me give a few thoughts. Trash that first dialogue. Well, no, because it could be that's what they are claiming, so I'm not even sure.

Yeah, it is a little bit unclear. But no, Jesus' return is going to be visible, powerful, and conclusive. That's the way it's characterized in Matthew, Jesus' characterizes it, Matthew 24.

And in fact, I just read a summary of the basic eschatological views, pre-millennial, post-millennial, amillennial, and all of you is whole to a visible return of Christ. They have different views about what the word millennium means and how that manifests itself in history as time goes on. But they all believe that Jesus is going to come back in the manner I just described.

Visible, powerful, and conclusive. And remember, that's Matthew 24, but in Acts chapter 1, Jesus ascends into heaven, and the angels show up after he's gone while the disciples are still looking around, gawking at the sky and says this Jesus will return in the same manner that he left. So, in the meantime, you've got work to do.

And so, everything scripturally indicates that when Jesus returns, that will be the end of the age. It will be visible, visible, powerful, and conclusive. And 1 Corinthians 15, resurrection of 1st Christ, the first fruits, then those who are his at his coming and then comes the end.

So, it's just that's the whole end of everything when Jesus returns on any understanding of eschatology. So, I don't see in any sense how this particular claim is justified. Yeah, I think that there is a definite distinction between John the Baptist and what they say

about Elijah and Jesus.

So, here's from Luke 1, 17. It is he, this is talking about John the Baptist, it is he who will go as a forerunner before him in the spirit and power of Elijah. So, this is what you were talking about being a type.

It's not that he was actually a Elijah, whereas with Jesus, it's very clear there are specific things that Jesus is going to do. Here's a verse, let's see here, this is Mark 14:62, you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. And this is what you're talking about, Greg, we are all going to see him return.

It's not going to be hidden, there's another verse where Jesus talks about, if somebody says, you know, look here, look there, you know, don't listen to them. Yeah, he's in the inner room, he's up on the hill, let's go see him. Yeah, so it's pretty clear that we will all know when he is returned, it's not going to be a question.

Lightening flashes from the east to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man. Yeah. And he's going to judge and that will be the end.

Yeah. So there's no possibility that, I mean, unless he's saying that somebody came in the spirit and power of Jesus, and it's not actually Jesus, but even if you were to claim that there's no indication in the Bible that that was going to happen, and there's every indication that Jesus' second coming is not somebody coming in the spirit and power of him, but him actually coming, returning the same way he left, and accomplishing certain ends. Okay, Greg, let's go on to the next question here.

This one comes from Ronnie. What are the opposing arguments to the current New Testament academic scholar view, Allison, Ermin, et cetera, that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet who was ultimately wrong. What was wrong on his prophecy on a coming kingdom within his disciples' lifetimes? Well, I guess the question of whether Jesus meant that the apocalyptic kingdom would arrive in their lifetime.

It's interesting. I think this is a little bit hard one to answer because this whole notion is a bit tricky. The early church fathers expected that they would see the Antichrist.

It seems that that was an expectation a number of them had. And then when it was clear that that wasn't going to happen like post-haste, that's when the curious, when there was more concern about officially formulating the canon, because now you have a delay that they didn't expect, and you also have false teachings that are rising from other people who are claiming to be somebody like Thomas, the gospel of Thomas. So this is why they had to kind of agree, okay, which are the ones that we understand to be authoritative here? So there did seem to be an expectation that things were going to take place.

The full resolution were going to be taking place shortly. But of course, the disciples

have gotten things wrong in the past, okay? And Jesus made it clear that there is a immaterial element of the kingdom that would be first and foremost. He tells Pilate, my kingdom is not of this world, okay? And if it was, then my angels would be coming right now to rescue me.

All right? There is a spiritual dimension of the kingdom that is being advanced, not the physical kingdom. And the disciples, even in Acts chapter 1, is it now that you will restore, I think the language is kingdom language there, the kingdom or something like that to Jerusalem. I'll get it quickly here.

I'm turning pages. She's punching. She's punching Keynote.

He thinks that she's going to be faster than me. Okay. Oh, I got it.

Oh, the day when he was taken up, the apostles made a committee convincing proof. He gathered together. He said, oh, they're watched.

Come together, Lord. Is this the time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel? And he said to them, it is not for you to know times or epochs, which the father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power to be my witnesses, Judea, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the most part of the earth. Now, this seems to me a fairly clear indication that the second coming will not be, and the initiation of this kingdom to Israel, the way they understand it.

By the way, they understood this even after three and a half years with Jesus. They understood that national Israel was still part of the kingdom promise. And Jesus doesn't take exception with that.

He simply makes a point about the timing. And first, you got a job to do. It's Jerusalem to the Samaria, Judea and Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

Well, that's a big job. And so that citation there makes it clear to me that Jesus did not mean to communicate that he was going to be coming next week, next month, whatever. Isn't there a verse about the gospel going out to the whole world or being preached the whole world in Revelation? I can't remember.

What am I thinking of here? Well, Matthew 24, and then the end shall come. Oh, okay. Yeah.

So that's, I think that's also, it's the Olivet Discourse. It's in Luke 21, Mark 13 and Matthew 24. So that combination there you see, but I think Matthew 24 identifies that particular point.

So I would just disagree with Bart Erman and others that Jesus intended to return, thought he was going to return in their lifetime because you have these other

statements. Yes, there are some statements that suggest that, but then there's the other statements too. So I think this is mysterious.

You can't say with a certainty that this is what Jesus had in mind. But the disciples seemed, the subsequent disciples seemed to understand, oh, this is probably going to happen pretty quickly. And then they realized, well, it's not happening pretty quickly.

Well, also they... Like the Thessalonians? Yeah, that's, yeah, there you go. When Paul had to say, some of you aren't doing anything because you think Jesus is coming back right away. Yeah, that's a second Thessalonians, right? And apostasy comes first, then the the man of lawlessness will be revealed, etc.

So, excuse me, anyway, I just, I understand why this issue would come up because it's, there's ambiguity and equivocation passages, but it isn't like that view that Jesus really believed he is going to come back shortly is, was in fact Jesus teaching and Acts chapter one is an example of a statement of Jesus that seems to indicate a much longer period of time. The uttermost parts of the earth? Yeah, and I think they're the verse that plays into this for people is the one where he says this generation will not pass away. So the question of how to interpret that, I think, I think there's some question to it.

In fact, I'm just going to throw an idea out there that I've been playing with that, that struck me the last time I read it. The word generation is sometimes used for people or people who are like each other. And that whole passage is in a section about people who are persecuting.

And so I've been wondering, and I just throwing this out there as a speculation, but I've been wondering if he's talking about the people who will persecute you will not pass away until all this is over. Like, don't expect that this is going to end because he's talking about all the ways they will be persecuted. And then he says, and this generation will not pass away.

So I'm kind of playing with that idea right now and reading it. That's interesting. I hadn't heard of that.

Some people will take the same point and apply it to Israel. This group of people, Israel will not pass away until all these things. So that is a comment that is pointing out to the durability of the nation of Israel, which of course we've seen amazingly over 2000 years.

Yet, I've never heard this option. And I think this may be an option as well. To be fair, I haven't heard it either.

It's just something that was an idea. I'm kind of reading it to see if it works out. You heard it here first, folks.

That is Amy Hall. But it is true that that word is used for a people group rather than just

like a 40 year span. Yes, that's right.

So that is a possibility for that. And the thing is, we don't judge all of Christianity by this one thing. When you come across something that you're not quite sure about, you don't drop everything that you are sure about because this one thing can make sense of.

You look at the whole web of everything we believe, the resurrection, the evidence for the resurrection, all these other aspects of Christianity, and you come to this one. And you say, well, it's not a slam dunk that he thought. There are different ways to look at this.

So until I know which way to look at it, I'll withhold judgment about how to interpret it. But I have no reason to think that this is the one thing that proves Christianity wrong. All right, Greg, do we want to do one more? Let's do one more.

And we might go over, but oh well. This one comes from James. What part does Jesus resurrection play in salvation? If he didn't rise from the dead, wouldn't our sins have still been paid for by his death? Does the resurrection seal the deal in some way or does it accomplish something separate? Well, a simple way of answering this is to go through your text and find every place where the resurrection is mentioned and see what the text or the writer says about the resurrection.

There's one passage that says that he was raised for our justification. So salvation is a big giant package. There's a whole bunch of stuff that's going on.

And part of it is payment of the death. But also part of it is victory over death. And so remember in the prophecy, the veil prophecy in Genesis 3, you will wound him on the heel and he will wound you on the head, something to that effect.

Speaking of the seat of woman understood there to be the Messiah and the snake understood to be Satan. So the Messiah would be wounded on the heel, but Satan would be wounded on the head. There would be a wound that's that but not mortal to the Messiah, but not in a certain sense, ultimately mortal, but a mortal wound to Satan.

It's interesting if you smash the snake head with your heel, it can hurt your heel, but it kills the snake. That's kind of the picture there. So what Jesus died, but rising again showed that his death was not in a sense, I was going to say terminal, but death is terminal.

But his resurrection shows the death was temporary and he defeated death for all of us. To accomplish other things, it somehow sealed the justification that we have. Now, I don't know if I'm in the best position to give you the entire calculus of that, but it does say race for our justification.

Okay, and there are other passages to talk about. The role the resurrection plays in the

package of salvation. And that would be a good thing to go back and check out.

That's the way to answer the question. Go back and see what the text says about the impact of the resurrection and the role it plays in the larger picture. So let me add a couple things onto that, Greg.

One thing when you're talking about him overcoming death, Romans 6 talks about how we die with him, we're buried with him, and then we're raised with him. So he was the first fruits and we're raised in him by virtue of being joined to him. So without him being raised, we wouldn't be raised.

So that's the first thing. So that's that's for our resurrection in addition to for a justification. When it comes to justification, what I think is that if you go to Hebrews and you look at Hebrew seven through ten, you'll see that Jesus had to enter into the heavenly temple, not built with human hands.

The temple that the temple on earth, the tabernacle on earth was built to represent. So the tabernacle on earth was just a shadow of what was what it was supposed to represent and what it was representing was the temple in heaven, where Jesus had to enter into with his blood. Because that's the other point that Hebrews makes on on earth in the tabernacle, you have the blood of bulls and goats, which can never take away sins.

But Jesus entered into the heavenly temple with his own blood and he applied that blood in front of the father to attain our justification. So I think that's how it plays into it. He's our high priest and were he not raised, he could not be our high priest.

So I think people miss that aspect of who Jesus is. He's he's not just our savior. He's our high priest in front God.

So that's in Hebrews seven through ten. And then one last thing, Romans one four talks about how Jesus is declared the son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. So it also declares who he is and his divinity and and his role as the Messiah.

So I think it's doing a lot. There's probably other things it's doing also, but all these things play into it, I think. Well, we didn't go over too much, Greg.

Well, thank you as if in Ronnie and James. We love hearing from you. If you have a question, make sure you send it on Twitter with the hashtag SDRask or through our website at STR.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.