

THE END TIMES

The Second Coming of Christ

The risen Christ ascended into heaven 40 days after he left death and the grave behind on Easter Sunday morning. The angels promised the disciples that Jesus would come back in the flesh. When can we expect him? Christians have been asking that question ever since.

THE APPOINTED HOUR

The Son of God came into this world the first time as a baby in Bethlehem. Micah prophesied exactly where he would be born. Isaiah foretold he would be born of a virgin. David wrote in Psalm 132 that the Savior would be one of his descendants and sit on his throne forever. The prophets did not predict the exact time of his arrival. They did not know the exact time, but they did describe it.

- Micah 5:2 *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*
- Isaiah 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*
- Psalm 132:11 *"The Lord swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: 'One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.'"*
- Galatians 4:4,5 *"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."*

The New Testament does not give the exact time Jesus will come again. We call Jesus' return the second advent. Advent comes from a Latin word that means "to come". Jesus will come again in all his glory and majesty as true God and true Man to judge the living and the dead. Like the prophets of old, Jesus did not reveal the appointed hour he would come, so that people would be ready and prepared at all times. We are ready and prepared when we believe in Jesus as our Savior.

Some have attempted to figure out exactly when Jesus will come again. The Bible commands us not to do that. The following are but a few of the "seers" that have misled people:

1836: Johann Bengel, a German Lutheran, devised a numerical formula that predicted the end of the world.

March 21, 1843: William Miller, a Seventh Day Adventist, became so prominent in predicting the end times that the dates were called Millerisms.

1874: Charles Russel, founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, predicted many "ends" from 1914 to 1994. None had been successful.

(Some have set other dates such as 2010, December of 2012, 2016, 2034, and September of 2047.)

- Matthew 24:36 *"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."*
- Matthew 24:44 *"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect him."*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:1,2 *"Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night"*
- 2 Peter 3:9 *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

Notice carefully in these passages that although the exact time has not been revealed, that does not mean that the end of the world is indefinite. God clearly reveals that he has appointed an exact

"day," "date," "hour," and "time."

After the gospel has gone out into the world and the Holy Spirit has called together those who are to make up the Church, Jesus Christ will return. Every person will see him. Every person will know who he is. For believers, seeing our Lord will be the fulfillment of daily expectation. It will be a day of great joy. For unbelievers, the sight of Jesus, whom they did not expect to see, will fill their hearts with great fear and trembling.

• *Matthew 24:30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."*

DISCUSS: What is the means the Holy Spirit uses to keep us ready and prepared at all times for the day Jesus comes again?

SIGNS OF THE END

The New Testament does give some information about the days before Jesus' return. We have seen that the second coming of Christ is imminent. Imminent means it can come at any time. We have the most information about the signs of the end of the world and the universe as we know it in Jesus' own words, recorded in Matthew's gospel.

Some of the signs take place as the day of the Lord draws closer. Others take place at the same time Jesus returns. Since the Holy Spirit has preserved these words for us in the Bible, we know that these signs of the end are nothing to be afraid of. The signs are a warning that Christ is coming soon and we should not grow careless in our watchfulness. The signs tell us something wonderful is going to happen soon, just like labor pains tell a mother she is about to give birth to her long-awaited child.

Have these signs already been fulfilled? Many have. However, God has so scheduled these signs that no one can compute when the exact day the judgment will come. God gave us these hints of the end times not to calculate the exact moment, but rather to encourage his people with constant watchfulness.

• *Matthew 24:4-14 "Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.'*

"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

• *Matthew 24:29,30 "Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."*

• *Matthew 24:38,39 "For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man."*

At Jesus' ascension the disciples stood there and stared up into the sky where the cloud had hidden their Lord and Savior from sight. The angels told the disciples to get on with their lives while they waited.

DISCUSS: What does Jesus want to find us doing when he returns?