

His Return *as King and Friend*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Dan. 9:24–27, Matthew 24, Luke 21:25–31, John 14:1–3, 1 Thess. 4:13–18, Heb. 9:28.*

Memory Text: “So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (*Hebrews 9:28, RSV*).

Though a distortion of the truth regarding the Second Coming, the *Left Behind* series of books and movies grabbed the attention of millions worldwide. The whole episode presented God as wickedly capricious, and it fostered a climate of irrational fear (if not panic) in people's minds about the Advent, a mood opposite to the way the Bible wants us to think about Christ's return. In the New Testament, generally, the return of Jesus is a glorious, supremely joyful event. He is our King, and also our Friend.

Though unpleasant elements are associated with the Second Coming (as we will see), it is not the fear factor that will cause people to turn their eyes toward heaven. Fear is important, and we do not proclaim the whole truth about the Advent without including it. But in doing so, we ought to stick with what the Scriptures explicitly say and not present anxiety-provoking nightmares of our own making. To give the various aspects of the Advent the same emphasis they receive in Scripture is to create in the hearts of those who care to listen something akin to the anticipation of children yearning for Christmas.

The message of the Second Coming should be good news, not something that sends people looking for anxiety therapy.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 28.*

Waiting in the Outer Court *(Heb. 9:28)*

The period in which we are now living was foreshadowed by the Day of Atonement in ancient Israel. As the high priest performed his once-a-year ministry in the Most Holy Place, the people, with bated breath, waited in the outer court for his emergence. That emergence would signal the successful completion of His work on their behalf, the eradication of sin from the nation and from the individual.

Since 1844, Christ has been engaged in a phase of ministry prefigured by the Day of Atonement in Israel. When that work is done, He will emerge from the heavenly sanctuary to receive His people. In the words of Hebrews 9:28, “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (*RSV*).

How do the following texts relate to the idea of expectant waiting?

Luke 12:40–48

Titus 2:11–13

1 Pet. 1:3–8

William Miller and his followers ardently expected the emergence of the heavenly High Priest in 1844. We know they were disappointed, but try to imagine the passion that moved them. Here were people who loved Jesus with all they had. They felt close to Him; they yearned to see Him. He was their friend. And the sentiments expressed years later by Hiram Edson fairly represent how the whole group felt. They had “confidently expected to see Jesus Christ and all the holy angels with Him,” Edson wrote. When that did not happen, “such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before. . . . We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.”—Hiram Edson, manuscript fragment, Center for Adventist Research (from Heritage Room), James White Library, Andrews University. These believers did not breathe a sigh of relief that Jesus did not come. Instead, they were disappointed, and bitterly so.

Are you excited about the Second Coming? Do you want it soon? Or are you fearful? Do you dread it? What are the reasons for your answers? Write them down and then prayerfully examine what they might be saying about your Christian experience.

Addressing the Fear Factor

There is a dark side to the coming of Jesus. Jesus Himself said it will be a time of distress for the nations: “‘At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn’” (*Matt. 24:30, NIV*). He compares the event to the judgments of the Flood and of Sodom (*Matt. 24:37–39; compare Luke 17:26–30*); He speaks of the phenomenon of final separation, using the illustration of two women grinding at the mill, with one taken, the other left (*Matt. 24:40, 41*). And when He speaks of remaining watchful, His warning could not be stronger (*see vs. 43–51*). Peter, one of those present the day Jesus spoke about His coming in Matthew 24, refers to “the day of the Lord” as one of fire and terror (*2 Pet. 3:10–12*). When John sees the event in vision, he says that “all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him” (*Rev. 1:7, NIV*); and Revelation 6:15, 16 portrays people from every walk of life at the Advent appealing to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and “hide [them] from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!” (*NIV*).

What do the following texts say about the Second Coming?

Matt. 25:31–33, 41

2 Thess. 1:6–9

Heb. 12:25–29

There are those who torture and abuse others, those who murder and exploit, who plunder and pillage, and who rob the coffers of their governments, leaving millions to suffer in degradation and poverty. And then there are the good people who arrogantly turn their backs on God and His gracious offer of mercy and pardon. It would be the height of irresponsibility to give them the impression that the Second Coming holds anything for them but bad news, unless they change. With people’s eternal destiny hanging on these issues, it would be criminal on our part to sugarcoat the reality of the situation.

In what ways might a little fear do us all some good (*Phil. 2:12*)? Maybe some of us need a little more fear than others . . .

On the Other Hand. . . .

As we saw in yesterday's lesson, there is a dark side to the coming of Jesus. But for the converted Christian, the scene is always bright; for not only is the Coming One their King, He also is their Friend. This joyous sense of anticipation is encouraged by Jesus Himself, whatever the omen over the horizon. " 'When these things begin to take place,' " He said, " 'stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near' " (*Luke 21:28, NIV*). No heads-down, drop-shoulder posture here. Jesus wants His followers to be hopeful, buoyant, radiant, in anticipation of the climactic day, to set their gaze toward the skies in wistful yearning for that glorious hour of His return.

Read the following passages, and see how they strengthen this notion of expectation and joy.

John 14:1–3

Acts 1:11

Phil. 3:20, 21

1 Thess. 4:13–18

Rev. 7:9, 10, 13–17

It is instructive to notice that when Jesus is speaking to the pompous religious leaders (or when He has the rejecters of His grace in mind), He emphasizes the majesty, the kingliness, the judgment aspects of His coming. But when His followers come into focus, the emphasis switches to ideas of comfort, assurance, joy. Thus in Matthew 24:31, immediately after talking about the mourning of the nations at His coming, the tone changes as He comes to focus on His people: The angels gather them, He says, from every nation into His kingdom. And in John 14:1–3, His promise to return is given to calm the "troubled" hearts of His followers, to steady their fraying nerves, to anchor them in hope.

If you believed, with all your heart, that Jesus was coming within the month, what moral changes would you feel inclined to make in your own life? After you think about your answer, then ask yourself, *Why wait until then to make those changes?* After all, might it be a little harder to make those changes than you think?

When Will We See Jesus?: Part 1

Matthew 24 is a pivotal chapter on the second coming of Jesus, recording Jesus' own response to questions raised by His disciples, questions we still have today about when the Advent will occur. Jesus emphasized several points, among them the following:

- 1. We should not be alarmed. (In the Greek, the statement is terse; we might even say, emphatic: “see to it that you are not alarmed’ ” (vs. 6, *NIV*)—whether by famine, by earthquake, or by conflict between nations (vss. 6–8).**
- 2. We will face conflict and hatred, even within the church (vss. 9–13).**
- 3. We should not be naive and gullible as we wait for the Second Coming (vss. 4, 5, 23–26). (Jesus lingered on this point!)**
- 4. The gospel will be preached in the whole world before the end (vs. 14).**
- 5. The event will be a spectacular, visible, worldwide phenomenon (vs. 27).**
- 6. Certain cosmic signs will signal the Advent's approach (vs. 29).**
- 7. As the end arrives, angels will gather together the faithful from all over the globe (vs. 31).**
- 8. The day and hour of the Advent is known only to God (vs. 36).**
- 9. Notwithstanding all warnings or predictions, the Second Coming will be sudden and unexpected (vss. 42–44).**

One important point worth emphasizing from the above list has to do with the gospel. It says that the gospel will be preached everywhere “as a testimony” to all, “and then the end will come” (vs. 14, *NIV*). This suggests that Christ's followers play a role, however indirectly, in creating a condition vital for the termination of human history. It thus calls for increased fervor on the part of each of us to advance God's kingdom where we are.

Leighton Ford tells about a prison chaplain trying to bring a condemned prisoner to Christ in a London jail. “Do you really believe what you say, Chaplain? . . . If I believed your Gospel were true, I would crawl across England on broken glass to tell men about it.” —*The Christian Persuader* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 29. That is the kind of enthusiasm needed now.

If the gospel must go everywhere before Christ returns, and if we are called to preach that gospel, then we ourselves have a role in working with Him to hasten the Second Advent, do we not? Yes or no? What are the challenges, opportunities, or problems this idea presents to us?

When Will We See Jesus?: Part 2

Sunday's lesson referred to the Millerites and how they eagerly waited (albeit in vain) for the Advent on October 22, 1844. What they, and we since, have discovered is that Jesus was not coming back the next day, either, nor the next week, the next month, the next year, the next decade, or the next century! And here we are today, some 164 years later, still in this world. How do we grapple with this problem in our own minds?

One way is to focus on the veracity and certainty of the event. In other words, regardless of the when of the event, we can come to grips with the fact of it, not by logic, but by considering who made the promise in the first place. It came from Jesus Himself, an authentic, historical figure, whose probity and credibility have stood the test of the centuries. We see this very Person addressing a group of followers, worried and apprehensive about His impending departure. Do not be troubled, He says to them. Trust Me (*John 14:1*). “‘If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me’” (*vs. 3, NIV*).

Review the following passages. How do they help put the issue before us in perspective? (*Gen. 3:15, Isa. 40:8, Gal. 4:4; see also Dan. 9:24–27*).

The promise of the First Advent was given way back in the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 3:15*); and the world was to wait thousands of years for its fulfillment. But as God's great cosmic clock struck the divinely prescribed hour, mystic beings announced to startled shepherds on a hillside in Bethlehem: “‘Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you’” (*Luke 2:11, NIV*). The promise did not fail; for it was anchored on the unshakable Word of the living God. And so it will be with the second coming of Jesus.

What good was Christ's first coming if we do not have the assurance of the Second Coming? How should the certainty of the First Coming, and what Christ did for us at it, make us absolutely certain about the reality of the Second Coming, regardless of whenever it happens?

Further Study: “Christ had ascended to heaven in the form of humanity. The disciples had beheld the cloud receive Him. The same Jesus who had walked and talked and prayed with them; who had broken bread with them; who had been with them in their boats on the lake; and who had that very day toiled with them up the ascent of Olivet,—the same Jesus had now gone to share His Father’s throne. And the angels had assured them that the very One whom they had seen go up into heaven, would come again even as He had ascended. . . . Well might the disciples rejoice in the hope of their Lord’s return.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 832.

Our concept of time has a lot to do with the level of anxiety we experience in respect to the so-called delay of the Advent. In Western society in particular, our expectation of temporal precision affects our thinking about the event. To be told that an event will happen soon has a certain currency with us, and we expect it to take place shortly, in the Western sense. For the Eastern mind, on the other hand—the context in which the biblical writers operated—the more important aspect of an event was its certainty; time was secondary.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ From about the mid-eighteenth century up through World War I, many people in the West thought that through science, reason, and technology, humanity could greatly improve itself, and that evils such as war, disease, and other calamities could be eradicated or at least greatly limited. Contrast that view with the view of the world presented by Jesus more than nineteen hundred years ago, in Matthew 24. Who was right? How should Matthew 24 be a factor in helping us have faith in the promises of Christ’s second coming, especially when contrasted with these other views of what the future would be like?
- ❷ There is a subtle danger in the fact that the idea of the Second Coming has become part of our regular Adventist vocabulary. This can prevent us from fully appreciating (and thus adequately conveying to others) the extraordinary, mind-boggling nature of this event. How can we protect ourselves from becoming hardened to this extraordinary event, upon which all our hopes rest?
- ❸ Look at your local church, and then ask this question: Are we helping hasten the Second Coming of Jesus, or are we part of the reason for the delay? Discuss the implications of this question and your answers to it in class.

Seeking the Lost

by FERNANDO CUNHA DIAS

I had always wanted to be a missionary, so I studied for the ministry. But God had a mission field far closer than I could have dreamed.

I was assigned to work with a pastor in his three churches in a region of Brazil where people are closely bound to their traditional religion. It was difficult to get people to even listen to God's message here.

Then someone told me that a woman named Vera lived in a camp of poor people not far from a town in the district. I set out to find this woman. The camp was located in a beautiful valley four miles up a steep mountainside. When I arrived, I found 70 families living in simple dwellings made from bamboo and covered with black plastic tarps.

I stopped at several bamboo homes asking for Vera, but no one knew her. Then I met a young man working outside his little hut. I asked the man whether he knew anyone who was a Seventh-day Adventist.

"Are you a pastor?" the young man asked. When I told him I was, he responded, "Praise God! I have prayed for a long time for a pastor." Then he introduced me to several people who had been Seventh-day Adventists, but who had not attended church for a long time. I arranged to return and visit each of them to study the Bible and minister to them.

The next time I visited the camp, I brought some church members with me. We built a little chapel from bamboo and covered the roof with a tarp. It was not very comfortable, but the people did not mind; they were eager to hear the Word of God.

Interest in Bible studies continued to grow, and evangelistic meetings were arranged. The district pastor led out, and several members of nearby Adventist churches lent their support to the meetings. Attendance grew until we had to build more pews to accommodate the people. Eventually some 200 people attended the nightly meetings.

Ivanette, a teenage girl who attended the meetings, had a recurring dream in which she returned home after the meetings to discover that she had left her sandals at the church. When she returned to the chapel to get her sandals, she heard a voice saying, "This is the true church, the church you should follow."

Following the meetings, 30 new believers were baptized, including Ivanette and her father. The "bamboo church" was organized as a company. Ivanette's father donated land on which to build a permanent church, and the believers are working to build a more permanent church.

Our mission offerings make evangelism such as this possible. Thank you for giving faithfully.

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The Bible gives us many inspirational stories of God's agents of hope. In this quarter's study, "Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries," we will focus on some of these outstanding missionaries; on who they were and what they did in seeking to bring others to a saving knowledge of the Lord of salvation.

This quarter is designed to lead us into a renewed commitment to share God's love with our neighbors, friends, and those in mission fields around the world, bringing us to a new dimension in our Christian lives.

Lesson 1—For Such a Time as This: The Apostle Paul

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Paul's Background (*Acts 22:3–5, 25–29*)

MONDAY: Paul: His Conversion and Calling (*Acts 9:1–19*)

TUESDAY: Paul: A Man of Like Passions (*Rom. 7:19–25, 1 Cor. 9:27*)

WEDNESDAY: Life and Salvation through Christ (*1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 6:14*)

THURSDAY: Themes of Hope (*Rom. 5:15, 6:23, Eph. 2:8*)

Memory Text—*Romans 15:17, NIV*

Sabbath Gem: The apostle Paul had a powerful impact on his world and radically helped to spread the gospel well beyond Israel. What a model are both his life and ministry to us in our mission to the world.

Lesson 2—"All Things to All Men": Paul Preaches to the World

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Paul Encouraged for Mission (*Acts 9:24–27*)

MONDAY: All Things to All People (*Acts 9:19–22, 13:14–16*)

TUESDAY: A Witness to the Philosophers (*Acts 17:18–34*)

WEDNESDAY: The Message on Mars' Hill (*Acts 17:28*)

THURSDAY: Paul's Method of Church Planting (*1 Thess. 1:7, 8, NIV*)

Memory Text—*1 Corinthians 9:22, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Paul gives us an excellent example of how we need to learn to adapt the way we present our message, depending on the context and culture in which we are giving witness to the gospel.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.