

## THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST

The Second Advent of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth could be said to be *the* theme of the Bible. All the prophecies of Christ's birth, death and resurrection culminate in the prophecies of His second coming. Yes, Jesus Christ is coming!

To the non-believer, the literal bodily return of Christ seems but an incredible dream, a figment of someone's imagination. But to all who understand the message of Scripture, it was and is a very real expectation, an anchor holding firm in a world of unrest and uncertainty.

Some nineteen and a half centuries ago a mere handful of uneducated, common men stood on a hill outside Jerusalem. Six weeks before they had seen their beloved Master betrayed by one of their own number, misused by the clergy, maltreated by the authorities and placed on a cross to die the death of a common criminal. Disillusioned and despairing they had scattered in fright. But their flagging faith was suddenly changed into unshakable confidence as they met and conversed with their resurrected Lord. Yes, there was no mistake about it-He was alive!

Forty days later these same disciples looked on with astonished eyes as angels of God lifted their Master from the earth. Awe-stricken, they stood staring into the heavens as "*a cloud received him out of their sight.*" And while they yet stood speechless, "*looking intently up into the sky as he was going...two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven'*" (Acts 1:9-11, NIV).

These words were the basis for the hope of the early Church, and they are the basis for our hope today. This same Jesus that was taken up into heaven to sit at the right hand of His Father will return in like manner-and soon.

The foundation of this hope is strengthened by the emphasis given the return of Christ throughout the Scriptures. For every time His first coming is mentioned once in the New Testament, the second coming is mentioned eight times. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, the second coming is mentioned no less than 318 times, an average of more than once to each chapter. Dare anyone not believe it? Certainly an event worthy of so much mention in the Bible is worthy of our concern and consideration.

Nevertheless, there have been and still are skeptics. The apostles, teaching so soon after the ascension of Jesus, were confronted by an Alexander the coppersmith who "greatly withstood" their words and a Demas who forsook them "having loved this present world." At one point the valiant apostle Paul said that "*all those in Asia have turned away from me*" (2 Tim. 1:15).

Peter also had experience with those who fell away, whom he described as those "*They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam*" (2 Pet. 2:15). The apostle John warned against false teachers, "*because many false prophets are gone out into the world*" (I John 4:1-3).

The scoffers of our day were foreseen by the apostle Peter who said, "*In the last days there will come men who scoff at religion and live self-indulgent lives, and they will say: 'Where now is the promise*

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*of his coming? Our fathers have been laid to their rest, but still everything continues exactly as it has always been since the world began”* (2 Pet. 3:3-4, NEB).

We see this prophecy fulfilled in our day. Many not only scoff, but even ridicule the idea of a visible, literal return of Christ. There are those who say, Who needs Christ to run things? We are doing all right by ourselves. They want no interruption of their self-centered plans. Others say, “It all sounds good, especially to be rid of all crime and sickness, but how do you know it will really happen? I’d rather take a chance on what I can see now than on something I have to accept on faith.” Still others doubt the authenticity of the Bible, looking at it as though it were like any other literature-to be read, but not to get excited about.

But in the midst of the pessimism and frustration of the present the words of Jesus spoken after the Last Supper on that memorable night still shine as a beacon light, a ray of hope in the midst of gloom: “If I go ... I will come again.” He did go away-and He will come again!

### **CHRIST’S RETURN—THE EVIDENCE**

The Bible was not written by mere men, “*For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Pet. 1:21). God, speaking through these holy men, gives us the assurance that Christ will return.

Bible prophecy cannot be taken lightly. Throughout the Bible we find many prophecies made years (sometimes even centuries) in advance of their fulfillment. The birth of Christ was prophesied by the patriarchs some 2000 years before the event. It was echoed and re-echoed down through the ages, Daniel revealing even the number of years that would elapse before His birth.

Daniel also foresaw four world empires that would rise and fall-and he saw this when only the first of the four was in existence. Jeremiah forecast the downfall of the nation of Israel and the subsequent captivity before it happened, and it came to pass as he had spoken.

Moses looked ahead many centuries to the dispersion of the Jewish nation, to a time when so many Israelites would be sold as slaves that the market would be glutted (Deut. 28:68). Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, even mentioning specifically that the temple would be completely dismantled (Matt. 24:2). The exact fulfillment of each of these prophecies, together with that of many more too numerous to mention, proves the Bible true beyond the shadow of doubt. Hence we can know that when the Bible tells us Christ will return, He surely will.

### **Old Testament Evidence**

The Second Advent of Christ was the sustaining hope of God’s people even before He was born. The prophets knew of His birth and work through visions, dreams or angelic appearances. And they spoke with equal

confidence and certainty of His second advent. Through the power of God they were able to look beyond the limits of the world in which they lived to the Day when God's plan would be culminated on earth.

Isaiah prophesied of His birth and concluded with a forecast of the time when *"the government will be upon His shoulder,...Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice. From that time forward, even forever."* He will *"come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger [judgment] with fury"* (Isa. 9:6-7; 66:15).

Jeremiah looked forward to the time when God *"will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth"* (Jer. 23:5).

Ezekiel foresaw the time *"whose iniquity shall end,"* when the down-trodden city of Jerusalem, no more overturned, will be given to Him *"whose right it is"* (Ezek 21:25, 27).

Daniel saw in vision the kingdom established under Christ the King. *"And the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High, His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him"* (Dan. 7:27).

Joel described how the Lord *"shall roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake: but the Lord will be a shelter for His people"* (Joel 3:16-17).

Obadiah prophesied of the end of the nation of Edom, but finished his short message with a vision of the future triumphant day when *"the kingdom shall be the Lord's"* (Obadiah 21).

Micah looked ahead to the time when Christ will have returned, when *"he shall judge between many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree; and no one shall make them afraid"* (Mic. 4:3-4).

Zechariah pictured the Lord's arrival upon Mt. Zion *"and all the saints with [Him],"* when *"the Lord"* would come to be *"king over all the earth"* (Zech. 14:4, 5, 9).

Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai-all described as minor prophets-did not fail to mention the Second Advent. Nahum saw a vision of the Judgment. Habakkuk gave the assurance that although the vision [the day of Christ's second advent] seems to tarry, *"it will surely come, it will not tarry."* Zephaniah warned that *"the great day of the Lord is near.... and hasten quickly,"* the day when *"You shall see disaster no more."* Haggai foresaw also a mighty shaking among all nations when *"they shall come to the desire of all nations [Christ]"* (Hab. 2:2-3; Zeph. 1:14; 3:15; Hag. 2:7).

Malachi vividly pictured the Judgments of God on the wicked, but gave the assurance to the God-fearers that *"the Sun of righteousness [would] arise with healing in His wings"* (Mal. 4:2), concluding his message with the announcement of the return of Christ's herald, Elijah the prophet (vs. 5-6).

These same prophets foretold other events which have already come to pass, demonstrating that they were indeed true prophets of God and giving us the assurance that the prophecies yet unfulfilled will as surely be fulfilled.

### **New Testament Evidence**

Christ Himself had much to say about His return. He spoke of it both directly and through parables. In the parable of the Ten Virgins, He pictured Himself as the Bridegroom who comes to receive His bride; in the parable of the Pounds, He described Himself as a nobleman who went into a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom, and to return (Matt. 25; Luke 19).

After Jesus' ascension, the apostles went out to proclaim the message of His return to all who would listen.

John recorded these words of Jesus, "*I will come again,*" in his Gospel, and in his later Epistles he wrote of Christ's return with the same confidence, saying "*when He is revealed, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is*" (John 14:3; I John 3:2).

Peter also spoke confidently of Christ's second coming. In his second sermon after Pentecost, he said prophetically: "*That He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*" (Acts 3:20-21). Familiar with Old Testament prophecy concerning the second coming, he used it to bolster the faith of his hearers.

Paul was very vocal about Christ's return in his Epistles. Having received the assurance direct from Christ, he had a faith which could not be shaken. Through his letters he hoped to instill the same faith and assurance in others. To the Romans he wrote of the "*day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 2:16), confirming the fact by quoting the Prophet who said, "*The Deliverer will come out of Zion*" (Rom. 11:26).

To the Corinthian brethren Paul wrote of Christ as the "*firstfruits*" (the first to be resurrected, judged and rewarded with immortal life), and then added a promise for every true believer: "*Christ the firstfruits; afterward those who are Christ's at His coming*" (1 Cor. 15:23). In his letter to the Philippians, he again expressed his hope in Christ: "*for our citizenship is in heaven; from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who will transform our lowly [mortal] body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body*" (Phil. 3:20-21). To the Colossians he spoke with confidence that "*when Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*" (Col. 3:4).

Addressing his son-in-the-faith Timothy, Paul appealed to all believers to "*keep this commandment without spot, blameless, until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing.*" And in his second letter to Timothy we read of the crown of life which is laid up in store for all those who "*loved His appearing*" (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Other New Testament writers are equally explicit about the Second Coming. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of Christ coming "*to those who eagerly wait for Him...a second time, apart from sin for*

*salvation*” (Heb. 9:28). The apostle James tells us to “*be patient...until the coming of the Lord*” (Jas. 5:7-8).

The New Testament concludes with the book of Revelation, a book dictated by Jesus to the apostle John in exile. Being a “*revelation*” of “*things to come*,” almost the entire book is concerned with the Second Advent and events that shall accompany it. From beginning to end it gives assurance of the visible, literal return of Christ. The closing chapter contains the promise of Jesus Himself: “*Behold, I am coming quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.... Surely I am coming quickly*” (Rev. 22:12, 20).

These promises are as yet unfulfilled, but they will not forever remain so. They are not the words of fallible man, but the words of an eternal infallible God, and their fulfillment is as sure as tomorrow morning’s sunrise! Christ is coming!

### **CHRIST RETURNS-WHY?**

Many who believe that Christ is coming do not have any clear or realistic idea of the events that will accompany and follow His return. Most fundamentalists picture His coming as a momentary event in which He comes to earth without being seen, gathers His faithful and removes them from the earth. Subsequent happenings are vague, but the majority seem to visualize the faithful as spending eternity in heaven rejoicing around the throne of God.

What does the Bible present as Christ’s work at His Second Coming? Jesus said during His ministry, “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working*” (John 5:17). He worked then, and will continue working. During His earthly lifetime, He testified that He did always those things that pleased His Father. By this complete obedience, He made Himself worthy of His greater work which is yet future.

#### Christ Returns-to Judge and Reward

Jesus Christ has been ordained as the Judge of all the earth. “*Because He [God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained; He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead*” (Acts 17:31). God raised Jesus from the dead; and after His ascension He was judged and rewarded and given a place of honor at His Father’s right hand.

Peter, speaking to newly converted Christians in the early days of the Church, said, “*And He [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead*” (Acts 10:42). And some years later, Paul wrote Timothy concerning the same matter: “*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom*” (2 Tim. 4:1).

At His return all covenant-makers of the six-thousand-year day of salvation must appear at His Judgment: “*For we [Paul included himself] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Cor. 5:10). Many teach that only the righteous appear at this Judgment, but Paul says it includes those that have done “*good or bad*.” This point is also made clear in Daniel’s prophecy of the Judgment: “*And many*

*of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).*

Again, writing to the Romans, Paul made clear that all must come to Judgment: *“for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.... so then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10, 12).* Again Paul included himself; it was *“we...all”* and *“each of us.”*

### **Christ Returns-to Reward**

Rewards are an important part of the Christian life. God does not ask us to work without any incentive. It was *“for the joy that was set before Him”* that Jesus *“endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).* With this same joy in mind the patriarchs of old endured, and it was for this same joy, the hope of future reward, that the early Christians endured persecution even unto death.

Since all recompense is *“to every man according as his works shall be,”* a judgment is necessary to determine each one’s eligibility for reward. Jesus Himself described the Judgment scene: *“When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the [out of] nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you....Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed” (Matt. 25:31-34, 41).*

Christ will bring the reward with Him at His return. That is, He will have the power to grant immortality to whomsoever is worthy. *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matt. 16:27).* These words were spoken to His disciples during His ministry, and near the close of His last message to mankind He gave the same assurance to His Church: *“Behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every one according to his work” (Rev. 22:12).*

Not everyone will be worthy of eternal life; some covenant-makers may merit less than a full reward, but all will be determined justly according to their life and works. The faithful are placed on the right; the unfaithful are placed on the left. Those who have proved faithful will merit eternal life in the Kingdom, but the unfaithful, those who promised and failed to keep their covenant, will merit everlasting destruction-not a burning hell, but death, a perpetual sleep from which they shall not wake.

*“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43).*

### **Christ Comes-to Conquer and Reign**

Christ is destined to be King over all the earth; but before He can rule over all nations, all must submit to His rule. This means that all those sovereign one hundred forty-odd nations that sit around a table in the United Nations will have to agree to surrender their sovereignty to the new King. Can we

picture this happening? We know they will not. To even think of their being willing to give up their sovereignty in favor of another, even a righteous King, transcends reason. A force mightier than the armies of earth will be required to bring them into subjection. And this struggle between the forces of God and the forces of the nations is called Armageddon.

What will be the difference between Armageddon and all the thousand conflicts which have ravaged the earth through the ages? In this conflict, right will triumph and Christ will establish a universal Kingdom of peace. Furthermore, no innocent victim will suffer. It will be the consummation of the prophecy of the angel Gabriel spoken to Christ's mother before His birth: *"He will be great....and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there will be no end"* (Luke 1:32-33).

For the 144,000 faithful who will be chosen to reign with Him, it will be the reward of their life work and the fulfillment of their highest hope and ambition. It will be the reality of a promise made long ages ago, the realization of the hope on which they staked their all, for they will be kings and priests to reign with Christ on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10). [For further information on this subject, see lesson 5 in this series, "The Kingdom of God".]

### **CHRIST RETURNS-WHEN?**

In the nineteen-plus centuries that have passed since Christ's ascension, His second advent has been the subject of countless books and sermons. Much speculation has surrounded the timing of the event: Would He come before or after the Millennium? Did the apostles expect Him in their day? Was Paul looking for Him to come during his lifetime?

Jesus did not promise any advance notice to any particular group of people, but He did say that we should recognize the signs of the times. It was not for the disciples to know, and it is not for us to know the exact day nor hour when He will come.

The Scriptures allow but one interpretation concerning His second advent: The only advance notice will be that of His herald, Elijah the Prophet, whose coming will be sudden and dramatic. Jesus' return will be otherwise unannounced, hence will contain an element of surprise, taking many unawares. Jesus Himself compared His second advent to lightning, a comparison that could never be used to picture an invisible presence. Lightning is apt to be startling, even frightening, appearing suddenly and without warning. So also will be Christ's coming.

### **When: In The First Century?**

A thorough study of the Book of Acts proves that the first Christians believed Christ was coming again. They had every reason to believe it, for the apostles had been with Jesus and they went everywhere preaching the Christ who had died, who had been raised from the dead, who was now at the right hand of the throne of God-they had been eyewitnesses to His glory-and who was coming again.

Reflecting on His ascension, they could recall His words concerning His second advent:

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*“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”* (John 14:2-3).

*“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Luke 12:40).

*“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”* (Luke 18:8).

*“Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping”* (Mark 13:35-36).

*“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory”* (Mark 13:26).

*“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He will reward each according to his works”* (Matt. 16:27).

*“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Matt. 24:44).

*“When the Son of Man come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory”* (Matt. 25:31).

Christ spoke frequently of His return in plain and straightforward statements. But because the apostles believed it and preached it, do we have any reason to believe that they expected Him to return in their lifetime?

Some Bible students find evidence that Christ believed He would come again in that age in the words of the Master Himself. Others charge Paul and the other apostles with having been mistaken in their expectation of the Second Advent in their day.

Did Jesus expect to return soon when He ascended? Did Paul mistakenly believe Christ would soon return to earth? The Bible alone contains all we know about the Second Advent, and to it we will go for the answers.

### **Jesus Misunderstood**

In His effort to convince people of the necessity of preparing for the Kingdom of God, Jesus used parables, object lessons and plain language. Some of these have been misunderstood.

*“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”* (Matt. 16:28).

This verse, taken out of context, could easily lead one to believe that Jesus was telling them He would return before they had died. But further study leads to no such conclusion. Rather, the promise was fulfilled before a week had elapsed. By reading the following verses we learn that just six days later Jesus took Peter, James and John up into a high mountain, where He was “transfigured” before them “and his face did shine as the sun”—a fore-vision of His second coming in glory.

In this vision the three disciples saw a preview of the coming Kingdom; Moses (representing the faithful dead) and Elias or Elijah, (representing the faithful living) were seen talking with the glorified Christ. That the event was a vision and not an actual happening is verified by Jesus’ own words in

Matthew 17:9, *“Tell the vision to no one.”* They had been eyewitnesses to His glory, as Peter later testified. *“Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place”* (Luke 21:32).

Just prior to these words, Jesus had been forecasting the signs of His second coming. He ended with a parable of the fig tree, saying that *“when they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near”* (vs. 29-31).

Jesus was saying in effect, You know when the fig tree puts out leaves that summer is here, so when you see these things coming to pass you will know My coming is near. The generation that would not pass away until all had been fulfilled was not the generation living then but the generation that would be living when the signs should come to pass, the generation that should see God’s truth shining again after the apostasy and should recognize the signs of His coming.

*“Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Matt. 26:64).

To understand this statement by Jesus, we need to keep it in context. Jesus was on trial before the high priest, having been accused by two false witnesses. The high priest demanded to know if He were the Christ, the Son of God. Though it would cost Him His life, He could not deny His cause, so He affirmed the high priest’s statement with the words *“It is as you said.”* and followed with the above quotation.

The whole passage is not meant to be a literal description of Christ’s coming but a confirmation of His Messiahship. He was saying, in effect, you may have me at your mercy now, but the time is coming when I will be the Judge and you will be at my mercy.

*“If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me”* (John 21:22).

Jesus spoke these words to Peter in reply to the question, *“But Lord, what about this man [John]?”* Many read into Jesus’ answer that Jesus was saying He might return before the death of John. But that is not what Christ was saying. He merely said that even if John were to live until He returned, that fact should not affect Peter’s service to God.

### **Other Statements of Jesus’**

While some of Jesus’ statements might be misconstrued, He also said many things too plain to be misunderstood. We will consider a few.

*“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because....they thought the kingdom of God appear immediately Therefore He said, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return”* (Luke 19:11–12).

Jesus saw the necessity for the parable because they thought the Kingdom should come at that time. He was simply setting them straight by picturing Himself as a nobleman going into a far country before He would return. In the parallel passage in Matthew, He is quoted as saying *“After a long time the lord of*

*those servants came and settled accounts with them*" (25:19). It was to be a long time before He would return to judge His servants.

*"Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6).

This was spoken during Jesus' last moments with His disciples before His ascension. They had not comprehended what He had been telling them about going away to return at a future time, and now He told them again, *"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"* (Acts 1:7-8).

Immediately after this, He was taken up into heaven. Ten days later they received the promised power of the Holy Spirit and went out to preach the good news of the Kingdom to the then-known world. Then they understood that the Kingdom was not for their day and time, but for the future.

### **Paul's Words Misunderstood**

Paul, the last and most eloquent of the apostles, has been often falsely accused of saying that he expected the Second Advent in his own day. However, a careful study of his writings should convince the most skeptical that he did not expect Christ during his lifetime.

The most misunderstood of his words is found in his first letter to the Thessalonians. Speaking of the Second Advent and the Resurrection, he used the term "We." *"We who are alive and remain"* shall not go before the sleeping believers, but after the Resurrection will rise with them to meet the Lord in the air (4:14-17).

These words are interpreted by many to mean that Paul expected to be among those alive and remaining at the coming of the Lord. However, the "we" is a collective "we," including the whole body of believers, some of whom will be living at the time of the Resurrection and of His coming.

From the reading of the second letter to the Thessalonians, it appears that the Church there had received the wrong impression and Paul felt impelled to send another letter to correct their misconceptions. After a brief introduction, he said, *"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...not to be shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed,... Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things"* (2 Thess. 2:1-3, 5).

He had told them all this before, and now he was trying to jar their memory, but that Day could not come until certain events took place. There must first be an apostasy, a falling away which he saw already beginning at that time.

He had mentioned this "falling away" in his farewell address to the brethren at Ephesus. Knowing that he would not see them again, he was warning them of false teachers: *"For I know this, that after my departing savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock"* (Acts 20:29). The problem-makers would even come from their own numbers. He warned further: *"Even from your own body [or*

church] *there will be men coming forward who will distort the truth to induce the disciples to break away and follow them*" (Acts 20:30, NEB).

Other statements from Paul prove beyond doubt that he did not expect the Second Advent soon. Writing to the Philippians, he said: "*All I want is to know Christ and experience the power of his resurrection; to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life. I do not claim that I have already succeeded in this or have already become perfect. I keep going on to try to possess it, for Christ Jesus has already possessed me*" (Phil. 3:10-12, TEV). Had he expected Christ's return during his lifetime, he would have had no need to look forward to sharing in the resurrection.

Later in his life, he felt that he had merited the reward and he wrote to Timothy: "*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that Day: and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

No, we are confident that Jesus was not teaching His second advent would be during the first century. Paul and the other apostles understood that it was to be at an undisclosed future time, but for those who heard their preaching it would be soon in that the only time they would have to prepare for the Day was their lifetime. After falling asleep in death, their next conscious moment would be the Resurrection and the Second Advent, hence the urgency of preparing to meet Him.

### **Christ Coming in Our Day?**

As men count time, it has been a long time since Jesus ascended into heaven, leaving the promise, "I will come again." Nineteen and one half centuries represent nearly thirty lifetimes for the average individual. Many have watched and waited and given up in despair. Others have died, faithfully waiting. Our founder, Rev. L. T. Nichols, thought surely that Jesus would return in his lifetime before the turn of the century—until he realized and taught his followers that there would be a "*tarrying time,*" a time when, as the prophet Habakkuk foretold, the event would "*seem to tarry,*" though in reality it does not (Hab. 2:1-3).

We live in this "*tarrying time.*" Just how long this period will last, we cannot know. We know that when the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled, He will come. Our inability to calculate God's time prevents us from knowing when it will be. But as the prophet Habakkuk further informed us, "*At the end it shall speak, and it will not lie, though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry, ...but the just shall live by his faith*" (2:3-4), or as rendered in the Moffatt translation, "Then answered the Eternal, ...The vision has its own appointed hour, it is ripening, it will flower; if it be long, then wait, for it is sure, and it will not be late....The good man lasts and lives as he is faithful."

The fact that Christ has been expected for so long does not in any way detract from the certainty of His coming; the prolonged delay only makes more certain the imminence of the reality. Every day brings

His coming that much nearer. Bible prophecies were seldom fulfilled when men expected them. Abraham reached the age of 99 without an heir through which to transmit God's promised inheritance; and Sarah, at the age of 90, had given up all hope of mothering a child. Noah had to wait 120 years for the fulfillment of the flood to float an ark he had built on dry land.

Only a few were holding to the faith of their fathers and waiting for the promise when Jesus was born. Multitudes were fed and many healed during Jesus' ministry, yet only 120 waited for the promise of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But for those who do not lose faith, all things come to pass in due time as foretold. Just so surely will Christ return when the time is right. There is nothing wrong with looking for Christ before the time. A man's time for preparation is limited to his lifetime, hence the need for preparation. And the need, also, for a feeling of urgency. In the case of any secular event of note, people plan and prepare long in advance. The Second Advent of Christ will eclipse anything that has ever been prepared for by men. Should we not be working, watching and waiting for it?

#### **Date Setting: When He Did Not Come**

Despite Jesus' clear warning that "of that day and that hour knoweth no man," many have attempted to fix the date for His return. It is said that men began to set dates as far back as the second century, but evidence for such a statement is lacking. There is, however, considerable evidence of date-setting in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Needless to say, any and all attempts to set the date have failed, as Christ has not yet appeared. The failure of earlier date-setters has proved to be no deterrent to others; the practice is still being followed today.

One of the most well-known incidents of date-setting took place within our state of New York. William Miller, founder of the group bearing his name and progenitor of the Adventists, began to preach in 1831 that "the present world would end about the year 1843." In 1833 he published a booklet on the subject, the first of many publications. He attracted between 50 and 100,000 followers. When 1843 passed without Christ coming, some of his associates set October 22, 1844, as the date of the second coming. After that date passed quietly, the group was stunned, though not entirely shaken. Several existing church bodies today find their roots in Millerism.

The theory of an "investigative judgment" held by many Adventists today is but a man-made theory developed to cover a man-made mistake. It remains a part of the belief of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church today. Such a doctrine is without Scriptural support-and none is offered-and merely serves to compound the error of date-setting.

Probably no existing religious group has attempted more date-setting than has the group known as Jehovah's Witnesses. It all began in the late 19th century when Charles T. Russell, the founder, declared in his *Studies in the Scriptures*, Volume 3, published in 1899, "We found the time of our Lord's second advent clearly proven to be in 1874-in October of that year....The Lord has come! The Lord is indeed present!"

Mr. Russell had arrived at this date through the application of Bible chronology based on his own interpretation of the visions of Daniel the prophet. Since no visible signs were forthcoming, the announcement caused little excitement, but he gained a band of followers through his explanation that the Lord would “come to his temple” in 1914. Faced with the arrival of the date and no arrival of Christ, to which the explanation was offered that He is invisible-only “to the eye of faith is he now revealed.”

Some years later, J. T. Rutherford, better known as “Judge” Rutherford, succeeded the late Mr. Russell and continued the date-setting. In his book *Creation*, published in 1927, Mr. Rutherford writes under the caption, *The Coming of the Lord*, “The Scriptural proof is that the period of his presence and the day of God’s preparation is a period from 1874 A. D. forward. The second coming of the Lord, therefore, began in 1874; and that date and the years 1914 to 1918 are specially marked dates with reference to his coming. ... The Scriptural proof supports the conclusion that the coming to his temple was in the year 1918....From 1874 to 1914 the prophecy concerning the Lord’s coming was being fulfilled and could be understood, ... by those who were watching the development of events, but not by others.”

Mr. Rutherford emphasizes the 1914 date in various ways, again describing it as the date that marks the time for the coming of Him “whose right it is” to take over the affairs of the world and stating that “the period of the Gentile times must end in 1914.” We also learn from his book that “the facts ... considered show that the Lord was present from 1914 forward,” and again that “the facts show that 1914 marked the legal end of the Gentile times and therefore the end of the world.” According to Rutherford, “These physical facts began exactly on time, in 1914, proving both the presence of the Lord and the end of the world.”

The above quotations represent only a very small segment of the printed material available on the subject and are quoted only for the purpose of pointing out the fallacy of date-setting. The practice is strictly forbidden in the Scriptures; it is not for man to know when Christ will come. To fix a date for Him to come is to usurp the power of the Father Himself who alone knows the exact time (Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36).

To say that the prophecy of His coming “began to be fulfilled” at a certain date, or that it “was being fulfilled” is to defy the plainest teaching of the Bible. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that His coming will be stretched out over a certain period of time or that He will be unknown, unseen or invisible at His coming.

We are not to set dates arbitrarily, nor are we to speculate as to when He will come. He commanded His servants to “*Do business till I come*” (Luke 19:13), not to give up their jobs and sit down and wait for Him to come.

Neither are we to be so encumbered with the things of this life that we fail to watch for His coming. “*Keep a watch on yourselves; do not let your minds be dulled by dissipation and drunkenness and worldly cares so that the great Day closes upon you suddenly like a trap; for that day will come on all men, wherever they are, the whole world over. Be on the alert, praying at all times for strength to pass safely through all these imminent troubles and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man*” (Luke 21:34-

36, NEB), was the warning of Jesus. Christians are not likely to be given to “dissipation and drunkenness,” but worldly cares are the lot of us all, and it is on that point we must watch, lest they blind us to the signs of the times.

### **CHRIST RETURNS-HOW?**

Jesus is coming again! Millions of believers in Christ share this hope. But how will He come? Silently and invisibly? In a blaze of glory apparent to all? Spiritually, in the hearts of men?

Will He come secretly to earth and gather the faithful to Himself? Or will He come with a host of angels, seen and heard by all the inhabitants of earth? Will He leave God's throne for a lower level of heaven, from there to direct the affairs of earth, forever unseen? Will He take the faithful to heaven to live with Him, or will He reign as King over an earthly Kingdom?

### **The Rapture**

There are many variations of the theory termed the “Rapture.” The word rapture is defined as “The state of being rapt or transported; the act of transferring a person from one place to another. In theology, to transport with ecstasy.”

The word rapture does not occur in the Bible. nevertheless the theory is accepted by the majority of those who believe in Christ's return. To them it represents the moment when the Lord will come to take them to heaven, the moment when they get to be with the Lord. The period of time to be spent in heaven ranges from three and one half to one thousand years, according to various religious groups, after which they expect to return to the earth to make it their eternal home.

They find the basis of their belief in the words of Paul: *“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The majority expect the rapture to be an event barely noticed by the unbelieving world. Descriptions of the event picture dramatic happenings: The driver of an automobile is pulled through the roof of the vehicle as with

a magnet, leaving the car driverless on a busy street. A wife is pictured as awaking in the morning to find her husband missing-he was a believer, she an unbeliever-and she begins a frantic search, only to learn that some of her neighbors are also missing. An airplane is pictured as crashing pilotless to the earth as the pilot is taken away at the rapture.

Do such happenings picture Christ's second advent according to the Bible? Will Christ sneak down to earth and snatch away His servants unknown to the rest of the world?

Believers in the theory think they find support in Jesus' illustration of two in a field and two grinding at the mill, with one to be taken and the other left in each case (Matt. 24:40-41). But was Jesus teaching that the righteous would be taken? Do we want to be taken?

To say that the righteous are *taken* and the wicked *left is* to contradict the Bible. Proverbs 10:30 is definite: “*The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not inhabit the earth.*” This is a Bible truth often repeated by the prophets, apostles and Jesus.

In Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares, the servant is told to let the wheat [the righteous] and the tares [the wicked] both grow together until the harvest. Then “*Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them*” (Matt. 13:30). It is the wicked that “*will be cut off from the earth,*” but “*the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it*” (Prov. 2:22, 21).

The very text used to support the theory, (1 Thessalonians 4:16) does not support the idea of a secret or silent coming: “*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God. . .*” (NIV). A loud command, or the trumpet call of God, are not suggestive of an unknown coming. Rather, they picture an event that will be noticed. Jesus confirms this with His own statement, “*For as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes to the west; so also will the coming of the Son of Man be*” (Matt. 24:27).

The idea of going to heaven from the meeting in the air has been read into-not out of-the text. Being raised to meet the Lord in the clouds concerns only *meeting* Him; it does not say that they stay there. The place of the reign of Christ and the saints is clearly stated in Revelation 5:10, “*and we shall reign on the earth,*” the place plainly taught throughout the Bible as the eternal home of the righteous. (Read Psalm 37, where the promise is repeated six times.)

### **The “Invisible Presence” Theory**

This doctrine, mentioned above, is described in detail in a publication entitled, *Things in Which It Is Impossible for God to Lie*. These questions are addressed: “In what manner would Jesus return?”; “Would the world in general see Jesus come again?”; “At Christ’s second presence, will He be visible to human eyes?”

The answers given state the position of the Witnesses: briefly, that Jesus came in 1914 as predicted, but that He was invisible to human eyes. We read: “At the time that Jesus ascended to heaven, the two angels who appeared did not say that the onlooking apostles would see ‘this Jesus’ come again ... The angels’ words, ‘thus in the same manner,’ do not say ‘thus in the same body.’ As to the manner of his going away, a cloud caught him up from their vision so that he became invisible to them. His return would therefore be invisible. ... The world in general did not see Jesus going into heaven; only the disciples....The words ‘thus in the same manner’ would accordingly mean that the world of mankind would not see him come again.... The natural eyes of the world of mankind will never see Jesus Christ again on earth” (p. 330).

“The return of Jesus Christ from heaven is as a spirit person,” says the text, because He was “resurrected as a spiritual body, and was made alive in the spirit.” Hence, “His second presence (*parousia*, Greek) is unseen to natural human eyes. When Jesus ascended to heaven before his onlooking disciples, a cloud rendered him invisible to them. Certainly if he came again, even with a literal human body, and was accompanied by clouds and had to remain at cloud level above the earth, nearsighted

people on earth would not be able to see him, except with powerful binoculars or telescopes” (pp. 332, 333).

### **The “Invisible Presence” Theory vs. Scripture**

The evidence used to prove the doctrine of an “invisible presence” is not supported by the teachings of the Bible. Ten different well-known translations, (including the Watchtower’s own New World Translation) all render the text in Acts 1:11, “*this Jesus,*” “*this same Jesus,*” or “*this very Jesus,*” proving beyond doubt that the angels did say that it was the same Jesus who went away who would return.

The statement that Jesus was resurrected as a “spiritual body” and therefore will return as a “spirit person” is without Scriptural support. After His resurrection, Jesus made a surprise appearance at an assembly of His disciples. Recognizing Him in their midst, “they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.”

Jesus’ own words prove conclusively that He was no “spirit.” He said, “*Why are ye troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? [Why do doubts rise in your minds? (NIV)] Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have*” (Luke 24:36-39). And as if further proof were necessary, He asked them for something to eat, “*And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and some honeycomb. And He took it, and ate in their presence*” (vs. 42-43). He was the same Jesus that had been crucified, not a spirit or ghost.

The argument concerning the clouds with which Christ went away and with which He is to return is also without foundation. Why should a being with power to come from heaven to earth be forced to stop at “cloud level”? What would there be to prevent His returning all the way to the earth, when He has the power of God at His disposal?

We believe that the Bible teaches the “clouds” to be more than the clouds of heaven which we see every day. The “cloud” present at the Ascension was a cloud of angels. Luke reported in the book bearing his name that He was “carried up into heaven,” and in the Acts that He was “taken up,” indicating the presence of real beings able to lift Him from the earth. We learn from Psalm 68:17 that “*the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels,*” and from Psalm 104:3 that the “clouds” are His “chariots.”

Another text used by the Witnesses to support their “invisible presence” theory is 1 Tim. 6:16: “*Who alone hath immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power.*”

From this text they deduce that no one will ever be able to see Christ. But were we to accept this explanation, we would also be saying that no man has ever seen Christ, something we know to be untrue. Christ was seen by multitudes before His crucifixion and by as many as 500 brethren after His resurrection. Reading verse 16 in connection with verses 14 and 15, we see that Jesus Christ is the One who only has immortality. But “*dwelling in unapproachable light,*” in which He [Christ] dwells can only be that of His Heavenly Father-and it is He, God, “*whom no man hath seen, nor can see.*”

Matthew 5:8 promises that the pure in heart, the righteous, will see God at some future Day, but that will be after they have been glorified and made like the angels of God (Luke 20:35-36). Man in his mortal state has not seen and will not see God. Only after man has attained immortality will he be permitted to dwell in the “unapproachable light” now. Then, and not until then, can he see God.

### **HOW Will Christ Come?**

The Bible teaches that Christ’s second coming will be seen, heard and known. To try to prove otherwise is to flout the plain teachings of the Scriptures.

Christ’s coming will be seen.

“*For as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes to the west; so also will the coming of the Son of Man be*” (Matt. 24:27). Lightning is, above all things, visible! It cannot be easily concealed, even by clouds.

“*Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory*” (Mk. 13:26; Luke 21:27). “*Behold, He is coming with clouds; and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him*” (Rev. 1:7). “*We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*” (I John 3:2). Here we have testimony of three of the Gospel writers that we will actually see Christ with our own eyes at His second coming—not that He will be seen by our “eyes of discernment” but that He will be literally seen by the eyes of men.

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## **NEW TESTAMENT WORDS**

### **that SPEAK of the SECOND ADVENT**

The common language of the people of Palestine, including the Jews, at the time of Christ was Aramaic. But the business language and the public language widely written and read was Greek. Hence the New Testament was written in Greek.

When the New Testament speaks about the Second Advent of Christ, it uses one of three Greek words: *parousia*, *epiphaneia*, and *apokalupsis*. Each word carries the idea of “coming,” but with slight variations of significance. We will look briefly at each word.

Parousia (pronounced par-a-si’a). The Jehovah’s Witnesses lean heavily upon this word for proof of their “invisible presence” theory, but a study of the word and its usage does not support their theory.

Parousia has for its meaning “presence,” and is so translated in the phrase “his bodily presence is weak,” speaking of Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:10. It is also translated frequently “coming” as in Matthew 24:3: Lord, “*what shall be the sign of thy coming [parousia]?*” and also “*Christ, the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming [parousia]*” (1 Cor. 15:23). It is translated the same in 2 Peter 3:4, “*Where is the promise of His coming [parousia]?*” Peter again used the word in reference to the Second Advent in 2 Peter 1:16.

According to the *Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon*, “*This word is used of Christ, and nearly always of His Messianic advent in glory to judge the world at the end of this age.*” It is so used in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, “*.... at the coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints,*” an obvious reference to

the Second Advent. When Paul wrote of being comforted “*by the coming of Titus*” (2 Cor. 7:6), he used the same word, *parousia*, and again when he is “*glad about the coming [parousia] of Stephanas*” (1 Cor. 16:17).

“Characteristically, in the New Testament *parousia* is the word for the Second Coming of Christ. What kind of picture would it convey to the minds of the early Christians? In Hellenistic Greek, *parausia* is the technical word for the arrival of an emperor, a king, a governor or a famous person into a town or province. For such a visit preparations have to be made....Always the coming of the king demands that all things must be ready.”

It is also said that it was common to date a new era from the *parousia* of the emperor. A new king would mean a new dating of time.

With this in mind, Mr. Barclay comments as follows on the use of the word in the New Testament:

a. It is used as the basis of a demand to preserve life blameless against the coming of the king. The preparations must be made (1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23; I John 2:28).

b. It is used as a reason for patience. “*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming [parousia] of the Lord*” (Jas. 5:7-8). The day is coming when the coming of the King will right all wrongs.

c. It is spoken of as something to desire and to pray for: “*Looking for and hastening the coming [parousia] of the day of God*” (2 Pet. 3:12). He who awaits Christ has something beyond.

. The Christian is one who awaits a king.

Epiphaneia (pronounced e-pi-fan'-e-a) This Greek word has the meaning of “appearing.” According to the *Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon*, “it is used in the New Testament only of Christ’s appearing on earth”: 1) of coming in Judgment; 2) of Jesus’ first appearance on earth (2 Tim. 1:10).

The word is sometimes used of Christ’s first advent, but more often with reference to His second advent. Some examples of its use are:

a. 1 Timothy 6:13-14. I give thee charge. . . “*that you keep this commandment ... until our Lord Jesus Christ appearing [epiphaneia].*”

b. 2 Timothy 4:1, 8. “*...the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead at His appearing [epiphaneia] and his kingdom.*” A crown

of righteousness is laid up for Paul in that Day, as well as “*all who love His appearing [epiphaneia].*”

c. Titus 2:13.”*Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing [epiphaneia] of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.*”

Apokalupsis, (pronounced a-pok-a-lup'sis). This word means “revelation, be revealed, or to lighten.” It is from the Greek *apokalupsis* that the word “Apocalypse” derives, another name used for the book of Revelation. *Arndt and Gingrich* say of this word: 1) “Used of the revelation of truth in general, as in Luke 2:32, ‘*a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles*’”; 2) “Used of revelations of a particular king,

through the author, as Rev. 1:1"; 3) "Used in the eschatological sense of the disclosure of secrets belonging to the last days, of the parousia."

As examples of the number three definition the Lexicon gives: "*When His glory is revealed [apokalupsis] you may also be glad with exceeding joy*" (I Pet. 4:13); also, "*That the genuineness of your faith, ... may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation [apokalupsis] of Jesus Christ... be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (I Pet. 1:7, 13).

(Comments on definitions from William Barclay, *New Testament Words*, pp. 223-224).

Christ's coming will be glorious.

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Christ's coming will be heard.

"*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God*" (1 Thess. 4:16). "*And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*" (Matt. 24:31). The sound of God's trumpet in the hands of His angels will resound throughout the earth as He gathers His people together. When the Law was given from Sinai all the people trembled at "*the sound of the trumpet was very loud*" (Ex. 19:16). The sound of the trumpet was often used as a signal of something important about to happen and it will be so used at Christ's coming.

Christ's coming will be sudden.

Jesus stressed the suddenness of His coming in His teaching. He compared it to the coming of a thief, not in the sense of coming stealthily, but that He would come unexpectedly. "*Take heed, watch and pray: for you do not know when the time is*" were His words to the disciples. "*Watch ... lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping*" (Mark 13:33, 35-36). "*Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect*" (Luke 12:40). A few will be looking for Him, but to the masses He comes unexpected.

Christ's return will be the climax of history. It will bring to an end one phase of God's plan and usher in a new era-an era of peace and prosperity heretofore unknown. Should we not expect it to be spectacular?

Christ Himself described His coming as with "*great glory*," and also "*in the glory of his Father*" (Matt. 24:30; 16:27). Paul looked "*for that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of... Jesus Christ*" (Tit. 2:13).

His second coming will be in sharp contrast to His first advent, when He came as an infant, as helpless as any other, and as a child was carried by His parents into Egypt to escape the wrath of a cruel Herod. When He returns in glory, He will have the power to subdue all the powers of earth and will reign with undisputed authority, the King of kings.

The glory of the Lord was evident on many important occasions throughout the Bible. It symbolized the presence of God. When the tabernacle was set up in the wilderness, “*the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle*”; when Solomon had finished building the temple and the people gathered for the dedication, “*the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord*” (Ex. 40:34; I Kings 8:11). And the promise is that when His plan is complete, “*all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*” (Num. 14:21).

### **SIGNS of Christ’s Coming**

Most men are naturally idealists. However, their ability to dream far surpasses their ability to bring those dreams to reality. In general, history is the written record of man’s efforts to translate his ideals into reality. Had all the plans and dreams of past and present world leaders been brought to fruition, we would have long ago had a utopian civilization.

How near are we to the great event of the ages?

Thinking people throughout the world realize that we live in troubled times. The daily newspapers and newscasts of national and international events mirror the unrest and commotion that is so common throughout the world.

The general breakdown of discipline and authority has given rise to a juvenile delinquency problem law officers are unable to control. Violence and crime have resulted in jails filled to overflowing, with more cases pending than can be handled in the courts. Meanwhile, there are physical disasters: droughts, floods, hurricanes, and plagues.

All these events might be labeled “signs of the times,” but they are not necessarily all signs of Christ’s coming. There are some students of prophecy who would claim that they are, pinpointing certain events as fulfilling certain prophecies. But we must beware of this practice. The Christian can know the “times and seasons” by watching world events, but it is not wise to pin a “fulfilled” label on any particular prophecy by associating it with this or that world happening. It is not for us to know the precise moment when the greatest of all dramas will begin, but watching the unfolding of events should serve to keep us alert and encourage us to watch our conduct and be ready.

The history books of the world are filled with records of wars both great and small. Likewise there have been earthquakes, floods, famines and other natural disasters-but these do not forecast the Second Advent. Jesus said, “*But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows*” (Mark 13:7-8). These things are real, but they are not signs of the end.

There are, however, clearly recognizable signs in the political, social and religious realms that point to the time of the Second Advent. These we shall study in the light of Bible prophecy.

### **Signs: Moral**

In recent years our country, and the world as well, has been undergoing a moral revolution. Revolution means change, and in no segment of society has that change been more noticeable than in the

accepted moral standards. No longer are right and wrong clearly definable. That which was once taboo is now accepted practice. Nothing is absolute; all things are relative. Morality based on God's law has been abandoned for a code based on man's personal likes and dislikes. We have what is described as "situation ethics," that is, making a decision wholly on the basis of circumstances rather than on any moral law.

True, there have always been those who violated the laws of society, but never before has there been a generation that rejected the idea of any binding standard of morality. The current idea seems to be that no moral standard is really important. The law of God is no more sacred than the law of the land. The general breakdown in morality set the stage for the great increase in crime and lawlessness that we have been witnessing in recent years, an increase that shows no signs of abating. At the same time, alcoholism has become a major problem, as has drug abuse-especially among our youth.

#### As in the days of Noah.

Jesus forecast nearly two millennia ago what world conditions would be at the end of the age. Answering the apostles' query of, "*When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the [age],*" He compared the time of His second advent with the days of Noah: "*Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all*" (Luke 17:26-27, NIV).

Going back to the record in Genesis, we find what caused God to bring about the deluge: "*Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,*" and "*The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence*" (Gen. 6:5, 11). The Hebrew word here translated violence is *chamas*, which means "a violation of the right of others; man's rights being trampled upon and this condition universal in its extent."

Violence was the cause for God's great judgments upon the world of the ungodly in Noah's day, and says Christ, we will have these same conditions at the end of this age. Violence characterizes our society today. We have it in the streets, on the TV, in the movie theaters and even in the schools.

Wilbur M. Smith, a retired pastor and professor, says that this statement from Jesus (Luke 17:26-27) "not only affirms that world conditions will be characterized by a great outburst of crime, murder, theft, adultery, etc., but it implies a condition in which basic law, the moral law, is repudiated. It is not simply man's determination to act wickedly, to engage in destructiveness, but living, thinking, and acting, wholly divorced from the great basic laws that make society possible and property secure. A good illustration of the use of this word is in Peter's remarks to the Jews of Jerusalem regarding the crucifixion: '*Ye have taken and by lawless hands have crucified and put to death*' " (Acts 2:23).

#### As in the days of Lot

Jesus' words concerning the days of Lot speak to us as well: "*It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom,*

*fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed*" (Luke 17:28-29, NIV).

"It will be just like this. . . ." There was nothing wrong with people eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building. These are the experiences of everyday, ordinary life. And today, it is "just like this," people go about their everyday life as though God did not exist. "God is not in all [their] thoughts."

The sin of Sodom was not in the things of ordinary life, but in their manner of living carelessly, their immorality, from which the term sodomy has come into our English language, referring to crimes against nature, homosexuality (a practice not only being condoned today, but recognized as legitimate by some professed ministers of the Gospel).

We learn from Genesis 13:13 that "*the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord,*" and from Peter that God turned "*the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, ...making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, oppressed by the filthy [manner of life] of the wicked*" (2 Pet. 2:6-7).

Immorality and vice today have reached the point where some are comparing our times with the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah. We do not say that the condition could not get worse, for it was also prophesied that "*Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse*" (2 Tim. 3:13), but the prophecies of a return to the likeness of the days of Noah and of Lot are surely meeting their fulfillment in our day.

### **Perilous times**

Paul's words concerning the last days reinforce the prophecies of Christ concerning those days: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-4).

The fulfillment of this prophecy can be found in the current news media. Our newspaper and news reports are filled with accounts of youth in troubles-drugs, robberies, muggings, vandalism- particularly at schools; barroom brawls, and every imaginable crime. Rebellion against the authority of parents and law officers has led to a sharp increase in youthful offenders. William Barclay makes an interesting point on Paul's prophecy concerning the last days. He renders v. 1, "You must realize this--that in the last days difficult times will set in," commenting that "the word *difficult* is the Greek word *chalepos*. It has certain usages which explain its meaning here. . . . There is the idea of threat, of menace, of danger in it. In the last days there would come threatening times which would menace the very existence of the Christian Church and of goodness itself; there would come a kind of last tremendous assault of evil before its final defeat."

Barclay renders vs. 2-4 thus: "For men will live a life that is centered in self; they will be lovers of money, braggarts, arrogant, lovers of insult, disobedient to their parents, thankless, regardless even of the ultimate decencies of life, without human affection, implacable in hatred, revelling in slander, ungovernable in their passions, savage, not knowing what the love of good is, treacherous, headlong in word and action, inflated with pride, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."

This, according to Barclay, “is one of the most terrible pictures in the New Testament of what a godless world would be like....It is no accident that the first of these qualities will be a life that is centered in self....Love of self is the basic sin, from which all other sins flow....Once a man erects himself as his own god, obedience to God becomes impossible ... and the essence of Christianity is...the obliteration of self.”

Commenting on the terms “braggarts” and “arrogant,” Barclay comments on the derivation of the words. Braggart was derived from a Greek word used to describe a quack doctor or medicine man such as traveled about the country offering cure-alls for disease. The word carried the idea of “The claim to good things which a man does not really possess; the man who pretends qualities that he does not possess, or possesses to a lesser degree than he makes out.” And says Barclay, “The world is full of such to this day: the clever ‘know-it-alls’ who deceive people; the politicians who claim...that they alone are born to be leaders of men; the people who advertise to give beauty, knowledge, and health by their system;...those whose one desire is to be noticed, by fair means or by foul.

“Even worse is the man who is arrogant. The Greek word used here means to show oneself above. Such a man has a kind of contempt for everyone but himself....In his heart there is a little altar where he bows down before himself,...while he looks upon others with contempt.”

Concerning disobedience to parents, Barclay says that the ancient world set duty to parents very high, and, says he, “It is the sign of a supremely decadent civilization when youth loses all respect for age, and fails to recognize the unpayable debt and the basic duty it owes to those who gave it life.” Of refusing to recognize even the ultimate decencies of life, from the original Greek this does not necessarily mean breaking the written laws, but the unwritten laws of society. It is for a man to be mastered by his passions that he will stoop to the lowest level, seeking his “thrill in the pleasures which are a shame even to name.”

“Men will be without human affection.” The Greek word used here is used especially of family love. “If there is no human affection, then the family cannot exist. In these terrible times men will be so set on self that even the closest ties will mean nothing to them. In their selfish quest for pleasure they will refuse to acknowledge even the fundamental duties and ties upon which life is built.”

“Implacable in their hatreds” can mean two things. It can refer to bitterness and bearing a grudge over a quarrel, or it can mean that a man is so dishonorable that he breaks and disregards the terms of the agreements that he has made.

To be ungovernable in their desires is to lack self control, to become a slave to habit or desire. “This is the inevitable way to ruin, for no man can master anything unless he first masters himself” (quotation from William Barclay, *Letters to Timothy*, pp. 208-219).

The Greek word translated “savage” carries the meaning of being “without human sympathy or feeling.” It is more fittingly applied to a beast than a man, but men can be savage in rebuke and in pitiless action.

In the last days men will have no love for “good” things. There can come a time in a man’s life when the company of good people and the presence of good things is an embarrassment to such a one.

“Traacherous” in the Greek means being a traitor. It refers to those who would pay back evil, to satisfy an old hatred, to gratify an old spite, to win a moment’s cheap reward.

To be headlong in words and action is from the Greek word meaning “to be reckless.” It describes the man swept on by passion and impulse so that he is unable to think sensibly.

To be inflated with conceit is in the Greek comparable with the English “swelled-headed,” to be inflated with a sense of their own importance. Lastly, they will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Here we come back to our starting point: men who worship self instead of God, who make their own desires the center of their life (William Barclay, *Letters to Timothy*, pp. 208-219).

Paul’s prediction of perilous times, or terrible times, or difficult times as some render the passage, is proving true to the letter. A lack of self-control is evident in so many of today’s happenings. It is the lack of it that leads to the general state of lawlessness that pervades our society. It is the lack of it that leads to murder, theft, adultery, drug addiction, alcoholism—all of which rank high among what’s wrong with the world. No one but a true prophet, inspired by God, could have predicted so accurately! The test of a prophet is in the accuracy of his prophecies. Both Christ and Paul stand the test. Therefore we can depend on their statements and know that we are indeed living in the last days.

Conscientious Americans, viewing the contemporary scene, are appalled by what they see. What started out as a slow-moving decline of morals in our country has developed into an avalanche. Only a decade ago co-educational dormitories at colleges and universities were unthinkable. Pornographic literature was not available on newsstands and in bookstores across the nation. Few people worried about being out on the street at night. “Four letter words” were not commonly found in the local newspaper and never in school textbooks.

Ten years of moral decline have made all these things commonplace. Who could deny that “evil men and seducers...wax worse and worse”? As Christians, it is not for us to stand by and wring our hands and lament, “What shall be the end of it?” But remembering the words of the Master and seeing these things come to pass, we look up with expectation, knowing that our redemption is drawing nearer. It is not for us to know how long the “last days” might be, but there can be no doubt that we are living in them.

### **The pleasure craze.**

The Great Apostle ended his predictions for the last days with the words: “*They will be men who put pleasure in the place of God*” (2 Tim. 3:4, NEB). Truly, pleasure has become the god of the masses. Not until our times have those watching for the signs of Christ’s coming been able to realize what the fulfillment of this prophecy meant. Many years ago the pastor of this church saw the beginning of the trend, but little did she realize to what extent people would go after pleasure 50 years later.

To “have fun” has become the express aim of the majority. An “eat, drink and be merry” philosophy pervades our society. With more money to spend and more leisure time on their hands, Americans are

spending more than 10 percent of our gross national product on the pursuit of pleasure. Industries that cater to the desire for pleasure are among the fastest growing businesses in the nation—their business has more than quadrupled in the last five years.

Spending for recreation has reached astronomical figures. The desire to “have fun” starts early in life, fostered by indulgent parents. Their free spending habits have made the toy industry mushroom.

The “pleasure craze” also ties in with the prophecy of Christ in Luke 21:26: “*Men’s hearts failing them from fear, and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth.*” The desire for pleasure, to have a good time, or to “get away from it all” is seen by some as evidence of fear. “When people are fearful about the future, they look for escape,” says one, and they seek this escape in pleasure, forgetting that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” In so doing, they are fulfilling the prophecy of Paul to the letter, being “lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God.”

### **Signs-Religious**

After categorizing the moral signs of the last days, Paul turned to the religious side of the picture. Here he spoke as accurately as he did concerning morality. After saying that people would be “*lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God,*” he added, “*having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof* (2 Tim. 3:5). The New English Bible says, “*They will be men who put pleasure in the place of God, men who preserve the outward form of religion, but are a standing denial of its reality.*” Phillips renders it, “Loving what gives them pleasure instead of loving God. They will maintain a facade of ‘religion’ but their life denies its truth,” and the Jerusalem Bible translates it, “*Preferring their own pleasure to God, they will keep up the outward appearance of religion but will have rejected the inner power of it.*”

No one today could more accurately frame words to describe the present situation than did Paul. It seems incredible that church membership could be at an all time high at the same time that morals are at an all time low and crimes of violence are steadily increasing. Yet that is the present-day situation. Only an inspired writer could have forecast so accurately.

### **Unbelief and skepticism.**

Our nation has become a nation of skeptics and unbelievers. Political corruption has caused many to lose faith in our government and its leaders. Slighted work, halfhearted effort and wasted time cause employers to lose faith in employees. The failure of the nominal church to offer that which fills the needs of its members has caused many to lose faith in their church. Unable to satisfy their spiritual needs within the church, many are worshiping outside the church—or not at all, as evidenced by the increasing number of avowed atheists.

Such a condition was envisioned in the negative statement of the Master: “*Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:8). The answer is a resounding NO!

### **Signs and wonders.**

In Jesus' Olivet discourse, He spanned the ages and unveiled the future to His disciples. Among other things, He said there would arise "*false Christs and false prophets,*" who would "*shew great signs and wonders; to deceive, [or would] if possible, even the elect*" (Matt. 24:24). Today we see these self-styled prophets professing to have powers that they do not possess.

Few today are so bold as to set themselves up as the Messiah, but there are many who profess powers which they do not possess, i.e., the Holy Spirit. The Bible predicted and history confirms that this power ceased at the end of the Apostolic Age. Nevertheless, through the years there have been those who claimed miraculous powers such as speaking in tongues, casting out demons, communication with the "spirits" of the dead, healing by faith and taking up serpents, all of which fall in the category of "signs and wonders." In recent times there has been a dramatic increase in all these professions, fulfilling the words of Paul that "*evil men and imposters will keep on going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves*" (2 Tim. 3:13, TEV). All who claim such miraculous powers as to "show great signs and wonders" are but deceivers, and as Jesus said, if it were possible they would deceive even the very elect, God's chosen few.

### **Scoffers**

The apostle Peter wrote that there would "*scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*" (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

Some scoff openly, deriding those who believe in a literal, personal second coming of Christ. Others fall into the category of those who say in their heart, "*My master is delaying his coming*" (Luke 12:45), scorning the prophecies of His return and taking His words lightly, showing their unbelief by their actions if not by their words.

Many who profess to be Christians are fulfilling this prophecy today by expecting to Christianize the whole world through their own efforts without the coming of Christ, wistfully believing that good will automatically overcome evil and all men will one day be brothers, living in perfect peace. However, a quick look at the record should serve to convince any and all that human progress is not inevitable.

### **Signs-Political**

We live in the midst of a disordered world. Never has there been a time in America's 200-year history that there was so much political turmoil around the globe. It is a world marred by terrorism, civil wars and internal strife.

But the darkest hour of the night heralds the dawn, hence earth's darkest hour heralds the dawning of a better day—the return of Christ. The problems of the world were foreseen by the prophets centuries ago, but only now are they meeting their fulfillment, further marking the present time as within the "last days."

### **Distress of Nations**

In answer to the disciples' three-fold question concerning the signs that portend His second advent, Jesus gave one of His greatest prophetic discourses, spanning the ages. He said, in part, "*And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring*" (Luke 21:25).

The sun, moon and stars of the prophecy represent the nations of earth, and the sea is the sea of nations. Never were more of these nations in distress for one reason or another than at the present. "Distress of nations, with perplexity" suggests a crisis situation among nations and we see just such a situation today as the world is shaken by one crisis after another.

World leaders often find themselves unable to cope with the situations within the borders of their homeland. They are truly perplexed. Perplexity means "confusion, bewilderment," words aptly describing today's distress of nations.

### **"The sea and the waves roaring"**

Jesus continued His prophecy with these words: "*The sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear, and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken*" (Luke 21:26).

The waves of the literal sea have always roared when buffeted by strong winds. Sea in the Scriptures is often used to denote nations (prophetically used in Revelation 21:1—"there was no more sea," or no more individual nations of earth).

The "sea and the waves roaring" is descriptive of today's political unrest and turmoil the world over. Unstable governments are frequently overthrown, and many men of the world are fearful as to the end result of the political turmoil throughout the world. Jesus' words are truly being fulfilled in our time, but those who understand God's plan need not fear as do men of the world. Rather, they should fear God, and Him only.

### **Beating "plowshares into swords"**

Through the power of God, the prophet Joel foresaw the consummation of God's plan on the earth. He saw clearly what would be happening just before the coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom: "*Prepare for war, ...Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong*" (Joel 3:9-10). The language is symbolic; plowshares and pruninghooks are not the tools of industry today, neither are swords the implement of war. But in the name of "defense," many nations today are sacrificing what we would term necessities (automobiles, washing machines and bathtubs) to have warplanes, tanks, missiles and submarines—and the manpower to man them—for "defense." Surely such war preparations can be classified as beating plowshares into swords and the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

Likewise, we see the fulfillment of the words "Let the weak say, I am strong." Small nations, newly independent, defy neighboring countries. They say by actions, if not by words, "I am **Readiness**

strong,” yet they are only fledgling nations hardly able to govern themselves. They are fulfilling Joel’s prophecy to the letter: “Let the weak say, I am strong.”

The United Nations was an outgrowth of World War II. Everyone had seen enough of war to last a long time, so a world organization was formed to insure the peace. The preamble to the United Nations Charter gives as one of the purposes of the organization “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”

But what has been the result? Is world peace a reality? We know it is not.

### **The Peace Cry**

The needless slaughter of human beings causes the peace cry to become louder. The past year has seen thousands of Lebanese killed in a so-called “holy” war. Great numbers of the citizens of Northern Ireland have been killed by terrorist bombs.

While peace talks progress, men are fighting in the field. The prophet Jeremiah foresaw this situation centuries ago, when men would be saying, “*Peace, peace; when there is no peace*” (Jer. 8:11). Unaided by divine power, mankind cannot bring about a true and lasting peace.

Another peace cry is foretold by the apostle Paul. “*For when they say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them....and they shall not escape*” (1 Thess. 5:3).

### **Lawlessness**

Individuals in growing numbers feel little remorse for breaking laws with which they do not agree. Moral standards have been lowered to coincide with the desires of the present generation and there seems to be little distinction between liberty and license. Surely this is the time foreseen by the Prophet.

The exact timing of the Second Advent is God’s secret, but the above are signs for us, serving notice that these are indeed the “times and seasons.” We live at that point in history where all the signs converge. Let us therefore, take heed to the signs and be ready!

### **Other Signs**

Knowledge shall increase.

Following the Industrial Revolution when the steam engine had been adapted for use in factories as well as ships, man thought he had learned about all there was to know. It was even suggested the U. S. Patent Office would not be needed—there was nothing more to invent! Were those who lived in that era to step upon today’s scene, they would scarcely be able to believe their eyes! Little did they know of the sudden surge in knowledge that was to come, that by 1950 scientific knowledge would have doubled and that it would again double in the next ten years—and again the next ten! “*Knowledge shall increased,*” was part of God’s last message to Daniel. He was to “*shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the end*” (Dan. 12:4). We are now in “the time of the end,” as we see the prophecy being fulfilled.

### **Justice is bound.**

The prophet Isaiah was given insight to forecast the future and his forecast has proven accurate. *“Justice is rebuffed and flouted while righteousness stands aloof; truth stumbles in the market-place and honesty is kept out of court, so truth is lost to sight, and whoever shuns evil is thought a madman”* (Isa. 59:14-15, NEB).

Technicalities of the law, clever lawyers and overcrowded prisons all contribute to the situation, accurately fulfilling Isaiah’s prediction for the last days, the “perilous times” as seen by the apostle Paul.

Doing evil with both hands earnestly.

The prophet Micah forewarned of a time when the good man would be perished out of the earth, and there would be none upright among men; when they would do evil with both hands earnestly (Mic. 7:2-3). With today’s soaring crime statistics this prophecy is being fulfilled daily. It fits in perfectly with the crime situation in the major U. S. cities, but no matter how hopeless the situation looks, the true Christian should not despair, knowing that it is darkest just before dawn—the dawning of a new and better day.

### **Summary**

We have reviewed many signs concerning the last days, the time immediately preceding the Second Advent. In our view, the majority are either fulfilled or being fulfilled, but let us be careful not to be too positive. Our thoughts are not God’s thoughts, hence the world situation, racial strife, crime and troubles between capital and labor could be worse before God breaks His long silence and sends Christ to this earth.

The older generation, comparing today’s scene with that of their youth, believe that our world is like unto the days of Noah and of Lot, when divine retribution removed the wicked element from the earth. But human comparisons are limited to a lifetime and may be inaccurate. Christ could come today, or tomorrow, but even if He did not come for a hundred years, our obligation would not be lessened. Our life span limits our opportunity to perfect a character worthy of perpetuation.

### **THE SECOND ADVENT· ITS MEANING FOR US**

When John the Baptist came preaching a new and revolutionary doctrine in Galilee, the people rose up asking, *“Then what are we to do?”* Tax collectors among them asked, *“Master, what are we to do?”* Soldiers in the service also came to him asking, *“And what of us?”* (Luke 3:10-14, NEB).

John’s message had touched their hearts and they responded. There had been a spiritual awakening among them. He had caused a stir among the people with his message of repentance and hope, and they lived in a state of expectancy. His words shook them out of their spiritual lethargy as he fearlessly went about his task of preparing “the way of the Lord.”

And what of us? Have our hearts been stirred? Is there a spirit of expectancy among us? Christ’s second advent is every bit as certain as was His first; it will come. And whenever it comes, it must find us ready. There will be no second chance.

What must we do? Our part is well stated by the Rev. Billy Graham: “First, we are to wait for the coming of Christ with patience. Second, we are to watch with anticipation. Third, we are to work with zeal. Fourth, we are to prepare with urgency.” In other words, our part is in watching, working and waiting-ready to meet Christ at His coming.

*“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Matt. 24:44). These words of the Master Himself point up the need of being ready. The time is short. We have no time to waste. The words of the ancient prophet come echoing across the ages to us of the latter days: *“Prepare to meet your God, O Israel”* (Amos 4:12). Are we preparing?

We have studied the signs of His coming and have concluded that we live at a critical point in history. It is the time described by Paul in his letter to the Romans: *“As I think you have realised, the present time is of the highest importance-it is time to wake up to reality. Every day brings God’s salvation nearer. The night is nearly over, the Day has almost dawned”* (Rom. 13:11–12, Phillips), or as rendered in the New English Bible: *“Remember how critical the moment is. It is time...to wake out of sleep, for deliverance is nearer to us now than it was when first we believed. It is far on in the night; day is near.”*

And because that day is near, Paul warns, there is something for us to do. Just knowing about the signs and recognizing them is not enough. *“Let us therefore throw off the deeds of darkness and put on our armour as soldiers of the light. Let us behave with decency as befits the day”* (vs. 12–13, NEB).

Other New Testament writers are equally explicit concerning “doing.” *“be even more diligent to make your call and election sure,”* said Peter, *“for if you do these things, you will never stumble”* (2 Pet. 1:10). *“Thus also faith, if it does not have works, is dead....Shew me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works,”* was the admonition of James (2:17–18). *“And everyone who has this hope in Him [the hope of Christ’s coming] purifies himself, just as He [Christ] is pure,”* said the beloved apostle John (1 John 3:3).

*“Let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching,”* was the warning from the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 10:24–25).

Paul, writing to his sons in the faith, Timothy and Titus, emphasized the necessity of godly living, reminding Titus of *“the grace [or gospel] of God”* that *“teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,”* while *“we wait for the blessed hope-the glorious appearing of...Jesus Christ”* (Tit. 2:12-13, NIV), and to Timothy (among many things) he wrote, *“be an example of the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity....Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine....Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine, continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you”* (1 Tim. 4:12–16).

Getting ready to meet the Lord is no part-time job, as can be seen from the above quotations. Rather, it is the work of a lifetime, hence we have put readiness at the top of the list. Preparing to meet the Lord is of the utmost importance, and until we have finished our work and made ourselves ready we cannot be said to be waiting for Him.

### **Watching and Waiting**

*“Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you I say to all; Watch!”* (Mark 13:35–37). *“Do not lose your courage, then, because it brings with it a great reward. You need to be patient, in order to do the will of God and receive what he promises. For, as the scripture says, ‘Just a little while longer, and he who is coming will come; he will not delay’”* (Heb. 10:35-37, TEV).

Watching demands that we be alert to danger. *“I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected. ...For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie, though it [seem to] tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry”* (Hab. 2:1, 3). It may seem to us that the Lord tarrys too long, but the trouble is with us, not with the Lord. If everything were ready for His coming, He would be here.

To continue in the faith beyond the point of our expectation requires much patience and endurance, hence the timeliness of the words of the writer to the Hebrews that we have need of patience to continue doing the will of God until Christ comes (Heb. 10:36). Paul likewise prayed that the Thessalonian brethren’s hearts be directed “into the patient waiting for Christ.” James’ Epistle also appeals for patience in waiting, comparing it with the patience exercised by the farmer as he waits for his land to produce a crop. *“You also must be patient. Keep your hopes high, for the day of the Lord’s coming is near”* (Jas. 5:8, TEV). These words are for us as much as for them. Their waiting required centuries of sleep in the grave; for us, time is short!

### **In Conclusion**

Christ is coming again! We say it with the same certainty that we say the sun will rise tomorrow morning. It is the subject of the whole Bible, the golden thread that runs from book to book, from the first of Genesis to the end of Revelation. A subject of such import commands our attention.

Knowing that He is coming again, the work of preparing to meet Him should be first in our lives. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,” was Christ’s admonition in His first sermon and it is as good today. We should ask ourselves daily: Am I ready should the King come today?

No one who is truly looking for the King will be found for one moment living on a low level, satisfying the desires of his lower nature. Being aware that the King may come at any time, he will be watching his every thought, word and action. The things of the world will have no appeal for him. He will be planning and living for another world. Like Christ, He will be in the world, but not of the world.

Are we ready? We cannot say that we are waiting for the Lord until we can say, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

## **MARANATHA!**

The Lord is Coming!

"MARANATHA" (meaning, "Come, O Lord!") speaks the hope of the Christian Church. This phrase appears but once in the Bible and is left an untranslated Aramaic word, *Maranatha*, in the King James Version. According to *Harper's Bible Dictionary* it was an Aramaic prayer used by the early Christians as a watchword signifying, "Our Lord, come!" A stranger arriving at a Christian meeting during the time of the Roman persecutions would be expected to repeat the watchword before he would be allowed to enter.

Maranatha! The Lord is coming! If we are truly looking for the Lord to come, this should likewise be our watchword. His coming could be very near; we know not when, but we know He is coming.

The Old Testament is said to contain more predictions of Christ's second advent than it does of His first. Some would say that the Old Testament Scriptures have been fulfilled in Christ and are therefore no longer relevant. But we are reminded that Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, believed the Prophets and freely quoted from them. Speaking to the Jews He said, "*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?*" (John 5:46-47).

The apostle Paul adds his testimony that "*Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*" (Rom. 15:4). It is this hope that has been the sustainer of believers down through the ages, and it is the Christian's hope today. It is sometimes called "*the hope of glory*," as in Colossians 1:27. To Paul it was "*the blessed hope*" (Tit. 2:13), also the "*hope of eternal life*," and the "*hope which is laid up...in heaven*" (Tit. 1:2; Col. 1:5).

Peter spoke of it as a "lively hope" and exhorted his readers to "*be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you [them] at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (1 Pet. 1:3, 13).

"*Hope that is seen is not hope: ... but if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance*," said Paul (Rom. 8:24-25). Hope can refer only to something yet to come; something past might be wished for, but cannot be hoped for. The hope of the Second Advent is not wishful thinking, not a dream of the night, but a hope that will one day meet its fulfillment.

All the Old Testament prophecies concerning the first advent of Christ were literally fulfilled to the letter. Why should we doubt the complete fulfillment of those concerning His second advent?

"Maranatha"-word of greeting

Passed between the saints of old:  
Let our lips repeat when meeting,  
Heirs of glory must be told-  
“Maranatha”-”Maranatha,”  
Jesus comes, ye saints behold:

“Maranatha,” word of promise  
By the faithful and the true-  
Precious parting words of Jesus,  
“I will come again to you.”  
“Maranatha”-”Maranatha,”  
Soon His glory we shall view.

“Maranatha,” word of gladness  
Cheering star of hope is this;  
Smiling through the rifts of sadness,  
‘Till the cloudless dawn of bliss  
“Maranatha”-”Maranatha,”  
Shine thou blessed star of peace.

“Maranatha,” this our anchor,  
Safely cast within the veil;  
Winds and waves may rage with anger,  
As across life’s sea we sail;  
“Maranatha”-”Maranatha,”  
Lo: the haven fair we hail.

Oh: ‘tis true our Lord is coming,  
Surely, quickly He will come;  
As we muse, this word we’re humming-  
Here we would no longer roam.  
“Maranatha”-”Maranatha,”  
Come, Lord Jesus, claim thine own.

**STUDY GUIDE**

Can You Answer These?

1. How can we know that all the prophecies concerning Christ's return are true and will be fulfilled?
2. Why is Christ returning to this earth?
3. Did Jesus understand that He would not set up His Kingdom at the time of His first advent? Give Scriptural evidence.
4. Did the apostle Paul expect Jesus to return in his day? Give evidence.
5. Does anyone know the exact date of Jesus' second coming?
6. What does the Bible say about the generally believed "rapture" theory?
7. What Biblical passages disprove the "invisible presence" theory?
8. Are droughts, famines, floods, and earthquakes signs of the end?
9. What are some of the signs of the last days of this age?
10. What are we to do, seeing that Jesus' return is imminent?
11. How can we prepare to meet the Lord?
12. How can we know if we are ready to meet Him?

(If you need assistance in answering these questions, refer to your Bible and to the pages of this lesson.)