

The Promise of Jesus' Return



SABBATH—MARCH 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 2 Peter 3:1–10, 13; John 14:2, 3; Daniel 2:44; Hebrews 9:28; Hebrews 11; Revelation 6:9–11; Luke 12:42–48.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Look! I am coming soon! I bring my rewards with me. I will reward each person for what he has done’ ” (Revelation 22:12, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: When is Jesus coming back? We do not know. But what really is important is that He is.

AT THE END OF THE 1990s, MANY WERE WONDERING IF THE WORLD WOULD LAST UNTIL THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM¹ in the year 2000. Then the year 2000 came and went. Some argued that the explanation of what would happen at the turn of the millennium was wrong and that 2001 was supposed to be the beginning of the new millennium instead. But, sadly, we are still here.

Seventh-day Adventists still believe that the second coming of Christ is close. Even some news reporters remark in their reports that the world seems to be coming closer to some great crisis (end). One does not need to be a prophet (special messenger) to see that the world we live in seems to be coming closer to some terrible end.

None of this should surprise us. After all, every Bible prophecy² about end times paints a rather terrible forecast for the world before the Second Coming. And that is exactly the world we live in.

When is Jesus coming back? We do not know. What we do know is that Jesus is coming soon. And that is what is important.

1. millennium—a time period of a thousand years.

2. prophecy—a special message from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

SUNDAY—MARCH 25**THE BEGINNING AND THE END
(2 Peter 3:1–10)**

The description of our terrible human condition is honestly and correctly painted in the Bible. But Bible writers did not always grow hopeless over it because they knew how things would turn out in the end. The last chapters in the books of Isaiah and Revelation give us hope that sin finally will be destroyed and that God's kingdom will be restored (brought back). God showed His prophets the "last things" that will lead to the ending of our world's dark history. These prophets did not hide the seriousness of the earth's last-day events. But they lived with hope because they knew that Jesus would come soon.

As we studied earlier, suppose you believe the world began by chance. Then you most likely will believe it will end that way too. This view does not really leave much hope for those in between such a beginning and such an end, does it?

But the Bible teaches that we should accept Genesis 1 and 2 as the true beginning of all human history. Nothing was left to chance in the Creation of the world. So, it is no wonder that the Word of God also points to a final end to this world too. Nothing will be left to chance.

According to 2 Peter 3:1–10, how does Peter connect early events in human history with final ones? What message of hope can we get from these verses?

The Genesis Creation and the final recreation are directly connected. The Genesis Creation makes the final recreation more meaningful. When studying the doctrine (belief) of last-day events, we deal with God's final acts toward His creation. These final acts of God lead right into the restoration (renewal) of His kingdom.

Jesus clearly connects the beginning of things and the end of things with Himself. Three times in Revelation (Revelation 1:8; Revelation 21:6; and Revelation 22:13), Jesus speaks of Himself as the Alpha (Beginning) and the Omega (End). (Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet. Omega is the last letter.) What Jesus shows us by saying this is His power. It tells us that Jesus was there, at the beginning of all things, and He will be there at the end. We can trust in Him no matter where we are. This also tells us that the world may be in a mess, but Jesus is always there for us.



Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, was there at the beginning of all things, and He will be there at the end.

Some Christians have moved away from believing that Jesus is really coming soon. Instead, they

think that we need to build the kingdom ourselves. Think about how people in the past have tried to do something like that. Why should we think future plans will turn out better?

MONDAY—MARCH 26

PROMISE AND EXPECTATION (2 Peter 3:13)

The discussion of “last things” is about the coming of God’s kingdom. So, Seventh-day Adventists³ have always believed that Jesus is coming soon. We believe this so much so that even our name, Seventh-day Adventists, suggests that Jesus is coming soon.

According to 2 Peter 3:13, how does Peter explain this hope in Christ’s soon return? Why is this hope so important to all we believe? Without it, why do we have no real hope at all?

Our own human hopes are often disappointing. Many times they fail us because we cannot control future events. Every plan of ours is tentative (not firmly decided) and depends on what happens in the future. The unfolding of history is not simple and depends on too many things for us to have confidence in what we may decide about it. And this uncertainty causes us much worry.

But the Bible writers promise us that we do not need to lose hope. The Lord is in control. And we have

the promise of His coming and the promise of what He will do when He returns.

What hope is found in John 14:2, 3; Daniel 2:44; and Acts 3:20, 21? What different point is found in each one of these promises too?

In all these verses, and so many others, we have been given the promise of Christ’s coming and the new world and life ahead of us when He does come. Try to imagine what it will be like. We are so used to sin, sickness, death, fear, violence, hatred, poverty, crime, war, and suffering that we cannot easily imagine a world without them. But that is exactly the world we are hoping for, the world we have been promised.



The name Seventh-day Adventist points to our belief in the second coming of Jesus.

TUESDAY—MARCH 27

OUR GREAT ASSURANCE (PROMISE) (Hebrews 9:28)

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we live with the hope of Christ’s soon coming to this earth. Some

3. Adventists—people who believe that Jesus is coming soon.

Christian groups have given up hope in this teaching. Some have pushed it off to the side. Others teach that this belief is simply an idea and not a real event that will happen in the near future. They may say, "The Second Coming is real in our hearts when we learn to fulfill (complete) our role in our community." Or, "When we learn to love others as we should, then the second coming of Christ becomes real in our lives." Yes, we should love others and be fruitful (useful) members of our community. But none of these practices are the same as the second coming of Jesus.

From our understanding of the state of the dead, it is hard to imagine what our faith would mean without the real return (coming) of Christ. At that time He will raise the dead in Him. The Second Coming is very important to what we believe. (Again, our name itself shows just how important it is.) Without it, our whole system would crash and fall flat. And that is because all that we believe in and hope for depends on the real return of Christ "in the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 24:30, KJV). Without that return our teachings take us to a dead end.

Of all the promises we have of the Second Coming, what is the greatest one of all? According to Hebrews 9:28 and 1 Corinthians 15:12–27, what one event, more than any other, guarantees His return? Why?

Of course, the great hope of the Second Coming depends on what Christ did for us at the First Coming.

After all, what good is the First Coming without the Second? In a way, the First Coming and all that Jesus did for us then would not be complete without the Second. At times the Bible uses the symbol of ransom⁴ when speaking about the Cross. Jesus Himself said, "Be like the Son of Man. He did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others. He came to give his life as the price [ransom] for setting many people free'" (Matthew 20:28, NIV). At the cross, Jesus, by His death, paid the ransom for our souls. It was a ransom that was full, complete, and once and for all. At the same time, what good is paying a ransom if you do not come and get what you paid for? This means that the paying of the ransom is not the end of the story. For example, when a kidnapper steals a child and demands a ransom from the child's parent, the parent comes to get the child. In the same way, Jesus will come back to get what He paid such a great price for. So, Christ's first coming gives us the greatest promise possible for the Second.



At His return, Christ will raise the dead in Him.

4. ransom—money paid to set a person free.

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 28**“ ‘WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING?’ ” (2 Peter 3:4, NKJV)**

From the earliest days of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Adventists believed that Christ's coming was soon, “nearer than when we first believed.” Today, we are still here, much longer than many among us expected. How are we to understand this “delay”?

First of all, we are not the only people who were disappointed when God did not fulfill (satisfy) His promises as soon as expected. For example, Eve thought God's promises for a Savior (Genesis 3:15) would be fulfilled in her firstborn son. Read Genesis 4:1. A correct translation of this verse should have the word *from* in italics.⁵ This is because the word is not in the original language but has been added by a translator. Eve's saying can be more correctly translated as, “I have gotten a man—the Lord.” But she was wrong. The child born was Cain, not the Savior. The Lord's coming was not until thousands of years later.

“The Savior's coming was foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy [soon] fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their firstborn son, hoping that he might be the Savior. But the fulfillment of the promise was delayed. Those who first received it died without seeing the promise fulfilled. From the days of Enoch the

promise was repeated through Bible leaders and prophets, keeping alive the hope of His coming. But He came not.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 31.

What is the main point in Hebrews 11? How does it fit into the whole question of “delay”? Read verses 13, 39, and 40.

All throughout the Bible, we have examples of people waiting for a long time. Look at how long Abraham waited for his promised son. Look at how long Israel waited in Egypt for freedom from slavery. Time and again in the Psalms, we read the question, “How long, Lord, until freedom comes?” And, of course, we should not be surprised about the “delay” of Christ's return. Remember what Peter wrote, almost two thousand years ago: “First of all, here is what you must understand. In the last days people will make fun of the truth. They will laugh at it. They will follow their own evil longings. They will say, ‘Where is this “return” he promised? Everything goes on in the same way it has since our people of long ago died. In fact, it has continued that way since God first created everything’ ” (2 Peter 3:3, 4, NIV).

Have you thought that the Lord would have been back by now? Do you sometimes find yourself discouraged by the “delay”? Or do you even doubt the Second Advent (Coming) because we are still here?

5. italics—when you see part of the script is set in different type (italics), it means that the wording is not found in the original Jewish language. Instead, it has been added by a translator later to make the sentence sound right or clear in English.

Think about all the evidence (proof) you have for belief in Christ's return. Remember, as you do, that you are a human with limitations. Your understanding of time is very different from that of God's.



Eve thought God's promises for a Savior would be fulfilled in her firstborn son.

THURSDAY—MARCH 29

“BEHOLD [LOOK], I COME QUICKLY” (Revelation 22:7, KJV)

That the Lord had not yet come is the reason for some of Paul's counsel (advice) to the Thessalonians. According to 2 Thessalonians 2, what does Paul advise the church at Thessalonica to do as they wait for the promised coming of Christ?

Certain events have to happen in human history before Jesus will come back. But the hope for the future is glorious (beautiful and worthy of praise).

The book of Revelation, the great book of “climaxes (endings),” also gives proof of a time delay. In Revelation 6:9–11, at the opening of the fifth seal, what do the voices

under the altar cry out? What is suggested there about the question of the “delay”?

How does Luke 12:42–48 help us to understand the “delay”? More important, what big warning should we receive from it for ourselves, who could easily start feeling the same way?

Then again, what about the verses that talk about Jesus' coming back quickly, or soon? For example: “Look! I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the words of the prophecy in this book’ ” (Revelation 22:7, NIV).

In a way, the Second Coming is as “soon” as our death. We die, and no matter how long we are in the grave—two, two hundred, or two thousand years—we sleep. And the next thing we know, because it seems like in a moment, in a wink of an eye, Jesus has returned! So, one could argue that from what we personally *experience* ourselves, the Second Coming takes no longer than the span (length) of an individual human life. The Second Coming itself is a real, universal (world) event that involves the whole earth. But we experience it only as individuals (persons).

As the years roll by, do you find yourself getting too comfortable with the world and forgetting how real the Second Coming will be? If so, you are not alone. How can we fight this natural, but very dangerous, way of thinking? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

FRIDAY—MARCH 30

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Another year has almost passed into eternity. A few more days, and we shall enter a new year. My brethren and sisters, make wise use of the remaining hours of the old year. If you have neglected your duty, repent⁶ before God. And return to the path from which you have wandered. Remember how short is the period of life given you. You do not know how soon your probation [length of life] may close. Do not say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain [profit].’ God may have different plans for you. Life is but a vapor [breath], ‘that appears [shows up] for a little while. Then it disappears’ (James 4:14, NIV). You know not how soon your hand may lose its skill, your step its strength. There is danger in a moment’s delay. ‘Turn to the Lord before it’s [it is] too late. Call out to him while he’s [he is] still ready to help you. Let the one who is evil stop doing evil things. And let him quit thinking evil thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord. The Lord will show him his tender love. Let him turn to our God. He is always ready to forgive.’ (Isaiah 55:6, 7, NIV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 23, 1902.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① In class, discuss your answer to Thursday’s last question. Discuss

the fact that the longer we are here, the easier it is to put off the sense of Christ’s return. But the longer we are here, the closer we come to that return. How is this so?

② Why has Jesus not returned yet? Are we responsible for that “delay”? Whether you say “yes” or “no,” how do you defend your answer?

③ In your mind, what is the greatest reason to trust in the promise of the Second Coming?

④ There is much debate in science about human beginnings. But many scientists argue that the long-term future for people on the earth, or even for the universe, is not good. They foretell that the universe is going to burn out or fall back on itself, leaving no life anywhere. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe the future for the universe is the opposite: it is wonderful. If science has the end of all things so wrong, why should we trust that its understanding of the beginning of all things is any better? This is especially true when science’s common understanding of the beginning depends on theories (ideas) such as evolution⁷ that deny a Creator or the design of creation by God Himself. How much more wrong could it be?

SUMMARY: We have many very good reasons for trusting in Christ’s return, no matter when it happens.

6. repent—to say you are sorry for your sins and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

7. evolution—a theory that the differences between modern plants and animals exist because of changes that happened by a natural process over a very long time.