

# Predictions *of the* End



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**A PEOPLE OF APOCALYPTIC.** Seventh-day Adventists are a people of apocalyptic; that is, we believe that this world will not get steadily better but instead will come to a sudden, dramatic end. But it will not be destroyed in atomic warfare, a meteor from outer space, or some other human-made or natural calamity. It will be Jesus who brings about the end of all things. He will return to this earth in power and glory and will bring down the curtain on the present world order. Out of it all and in due time (after the 1,000 years of desolation foretold in Revelation 20), God will make a new heaven and earth for the eternal home of His people.

Our very name, Adventists, proclaims to the world that we believe Jesus is coming again. Indeed, we are Adventists because Jesus was an Adventist. The scripture passage we study this week, along with its parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, gives a sketch, a broad outline of the future, from Jesus' own day until He comes again. And the speaker is Jesus Himself.

**The Week at a Glance:** What was the context of Christ's discourse on the end of the world? What hope did He offer amid all these troubling words? How well does the world match Christ's predictions about what it would be like prior to His return?

**Scripture Passage for the Week:** *Mark 13:1-36.*

**Memory Text:** "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (*Mark 13:10, NIV*).

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 4.*

## The Disciples' Questions *(Mark 13:1-4)*.

**What** was the setting for Jesus' predictions of the end? *(Mark 13:1-3)*.

Matthew records that, as Jesus ended His teaching in the temple, He wept over the beloved city, prophesying: " 'Look, your house is left to you desolate' " *(Matt. 23:38, NIV)*. This remark probably prompted the disciples' comment about the massive foundations and magnificent buildings of the temple as they walked away from it. Even today, when you visit Jerusalem and walk the site of the old temple square, you cannot but be impressed by the size and grandeur of what it had been. Some of the stones of the foundation have been excavated, and they are huge. No wonder the disciples marveled at Jesus' prediction that everything would be thrown down.

**Comparing** Mark's account with Matthew's *(Matt. 24:1-3)*, **note carefully the questions of the disciples. The disciples thought they were asking a single question, but Jesus talked not only about the destruction of Jerusalem but about His second coming. Why do you think He linked both events?**

To the disciples, it seemed that the events that would lead to the destruction of the temple and city could be so calamitous that they must be those of the end of the world. For them, the fall of Jerusalem would coincide with the return of Jesus to earth. But they were mistaken: Jerusalem indeed would fall and the temple be cast down, but many more years would elapse before Jesus would come back. It is like people traveling across India who see the Himalayas. They think they see the top, but they see only the first ridges. As they climb, they see another ridge beyond and another and another, each rising higher. Far inside the mountain fastnesses, much farther than they imagined, lies the peak, Mount Everest.

The setting of Jesus' words is critical for interpreting His prophecies of the end. His reply encompassed both aspects of the disciples' question—the fall of Jerusalem and His second coming. His answer is comprehensive: Some predictions are specific to the fall of Jerusalem, some to the end of the world, and some apply to both events.

**Having pointed with pride to the most glorious structure in their world, as well as the center of their faith, the disciples are then told by Christ that it will become nothing but rubble. What's the spiritual principle here that we need to keep constantly before us in our own lives, as well? See also Job 8:9; Jer. 7:3, 4; James 4:14; 2 Pet. 3:10-12; 1 John 2:16-17.**

## **Signs of the End** (*Mark 13:5-13*).

**Study** Christ's words about the signs leading up to the end of the world. Amid all the violence, persecution, and bloodshed, He nevertheless gives His followers words of encouragement. What are those words, scattered through this discourse, and what kind of hope do they offer to us amid the terrible events that Jesus predicted would take place in the world?

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Jesus makes clear that the time of the end will be one of bad news and good news. On one hand, His followers can expect upheavals in the social, political, and natural worlds, with everything out of course and stability a thing of the past. Yet, there will be good news—the gospel, the message of God's love manifested in Jesus, who died for our sins—will be proclaimed to all nations.

**Even** a hundred years ago the prospect of the gospel going to all nations would have seemed an implausible, if not exactly an impossible, occurrence. What's changed in recent times that now makes the fulfillment of this prediction seem much more likely? What do we have now that previous generations didn't?

As Christians, we, of course, are always pained and dismayed, as are others, over the wars, the natural disasters, and traumas that Jesus said would come. And yet, the fact that He told us about them, and the fact that even amid all this He gives His followers words of encouragement, should help us maintain faith despite the terrible state of the world. This principle is seen through the Old Testament, as well. Prophet after prophet, though warning about destruction, judgment, calamity, and so forth, almost always, amid the warnings, gave words of hope to those who would otherwise have been sorely tempted to give up on God (*2 Chron. 7:13, 14; Jer. 29:10; 36:1-3; Amos 5:4*). In other words, as you read this discourse, however depressing in one sense it might be, we still have so many reasons to hope.

**Amid whatever struggles, traumas, and trials you are now facing, what God-given hope, and promises, are you clinging to that, even amid your suffering, keeps you going? Write out a paragraph focusing only on the hope you have in Christ.**

## The Fall of Jerusalem *(Mark 13:11–19).*

While several verses in today's passage could apply to followers of Christ in every age, some are specific to the fall of Jerusalem.

**What** was the specific sign of the imminent end of Jerusalem that Christ's followers were to watch for? *(Mark 13:14; See also Matt. 24:15, Luke 21:20).*

Jesus talked about the "abomination of desolation." This is a reference to Daniel 9:27, where the prophet is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans many centuries after Daniel was first given the vision. We know this because Jesus Himself, by His words here, shows that this is what it means.

And the Christians took Jesus' words seriously too. As the storm clouds gathered and at last the Roman armies besieged Jerusalem in A.D. 67–70, they were ready. Jesus' warning indicated that when the time came to leave they should do so without delay, and that is what they did. But how could they escape from the city when it was surrounded by foreign soldiers? The Jewish historian Josephus, who lived through the fall of Jerusalem, provides the explanation: "Josephus says (*War* vi. 9.3 [420]) more than one million people perished during and after the siege of the city and 97,000 more were taken captive. However, during a temporary respite, when the Romans unexpectedly raised their siege of Jerusalem, all the Christians fled, and it is said that not one of them lost his life. Their place of retreat was Pella, a city in the foothills east of the Jordan River, about 17 mi. . . . south of the Lake of Galilee.

"According to Josephus, Titus, commander of the Roman armies, confessed that neither his armies nor his siege engines could have been successful in breaching the walls of Jerusalem unless God Himself had so willed it. The stubborn defense of the city so infuriated the Roman soldiers, that when they finally entered, their desire for revenge knew no bounds."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 499.

**The siege of Jerusalem was one of the most brutal devastations in all history. Women, children, and babies starved to death. Families murdered each other over every morsel of food, including pigeon droppings. And yet, God knew it all in advance, as shown by both Daniel's and Jesus' prophecy. How would you, as a Christian, explain to a non-Christian how a loving God, knowing what would happen, would let it happen? How do you, in your own mind, reconcile these kind of tragedies with an all-loving, all-powerful God?**

## The Second Coming *(Mark 13:19-27)*.

While we cannot pinpoint every statement in Jesus' predictions in Mark 13 as referring either to the fall of Jerusalem or to the Second Coming, the overall direction of the chapter is clear. After "signs" of a more general nature, He gives specific evidence to indicate the capture of Jerusalem (*vss. 14-18*). Then He moves toward the end of the world in which He gives direct, unambiguous statements concerning the Second Coming (*vss. 26, 27*).

**Study** Mark 13:14-27, bearing in mind that Jesus here has left behind discussion of the fall of Jerusalem. Below, summarize the essence of what Jesus said would take place in the future but prior to His return. Don't focus on the details as much as on the general state of the world.

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**Compare** what you wrote to the state of the world since Christ's words. How well do they match?

Read carefully and prayerfully verse 23. Look what came before it: a depiction of a terrible time, affliction, violence, false christs and false signs, and wonders so deceptive that even the elect were in danger of being deceived. And yet, after this, Jesus basically says, *Look, these terrible things are happening, but don't be discouraged or lose faith, because I am telling you beforehand that it will happen*. Again, even amid such a dire warning, the Lord is giving His people reasons to hope. If anything, because He said these things would happen, they in their own terrible way help prove the truth of what Jesus said (*see also John 13:19*). And we must remember not to focus only on these events but on the event they are all leading up to: the second coming of Christ.

**Russian poetess Anna Akhmatova, writing during a terrible crisis in her homeland ("Everything is plundered, betrayed, sold"), nevertheless asked, "Why then do we not despair?" Her answer was: "By day, from the surrounding woods, / cherries blow summer into town; / at night the deep transparent skies / glitter with new galaxies."—*Poems of Akhmatova* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973), p. 73. From what did she derive hope? What do we have as Christians that should give us a greater hope?**

## Awaiting the Advent *(Mark 13:28-37).*

**What** lesson does the fig tree teach us? Why can't we know the exact date of Jesus' coming? (vss. 28, 29, 32, 33). Why might it not be good to know the exact time of Christ's return?

Nature itself alerts us to the Second Coming, if we but open our eyes. Every year as the earth puts forth new growth, we know that summer is coming. We don't know just when the hot days will hit, but we can be 100 percent sure that they will come. Even so, the signs of the return of Jesus have been accumulating over the centuries, and we can know that His coming will follow as surely as spring follows winter.

During Ellen White's long ministry, she encountered various attempts to set dates for the Second Coming. She refused to be caught up in any of these speculations, instead instructing Adventists to beware of them. In a sermon preached at Lansing, Michigan, in 1891, she counseled us to give more attention to how we *live* day by day. The sermon, titled "It Is Not for You to Know the Times or the Seasons," was based on Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 and included the following counsel: "We are not to know the definite time either for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or for the coming of Christ. . . .

"We are not to live upon time excitement. We are not to be engrossed with speculations in regard to the times and the seasons which God has not revealed. . . . His followers are to be in the position of those who are listening for the orders of their Captain; they are to watch, wait, pray, and work, as they approach the time for the coming of the Lord; but no one will be able to predict just when that time will come; for 'of that day and hour knoweth no man.' You will not be able to say that He will come in one, two, or five years, neither are you to put off His coming by stating that it may not be for ten or twenty years."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 188, 189.

**What** key word does Jesus use to describe the attitude we need to have as we wait for His return? *(Mark 13:34-37).*

Jesus' parable of the householder who goes away and leaves servants in charge teaches the lesson as His illustration of the fig tree. The Master's return is absolutely certain, but we cannot know just when. Each day that goes by brings the Second Coming one day closer.

**In Jesus' parable, "watching" meant being ready to open the door when the Master returned. What does "watching" mean to us today? What things can cause us to fall "asleep," and how can we avoid them?**

**FURTHER STUDY:** Compare Mark's account of Jesus' Olivet discourse with the parallels in Matthew 24:1-51 and Luke 21:5-36. Read Ellen G. White's "On the Mount of Olives," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 627-636.

In the discourse on the signs leading up to the Second Coming, it's important not to get so caught up in all the gloom and doom that we forget the great hope awaiting us—eternal life in Christ: "No wonder, then, that the New Testament comes laced with promises of eternal life (John 3:16, John 6:54, John 10:28, Luke 18:30, Rom. 6:22, 1 Tim. 1:16, Titus 3:7, 1 John 5:13), for only the eternal guarantees restitution. A million years, even a billion years, might not possess enough good moments to make up for the bad suffered here. Eternity alone can balance all things out, and then some, because the infinite is more than the finite, and always infinitely so."—*Adventist Review*, Feb. 28, 2002, p. 22.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read the above quote from the *Adventist Review*. What is the author saying? As a class, discuss the hope it is talking about.
- ❷ Of all the signs of the Advent given in this week's lesson, which one is clearly yet to be fulfilled? What is our role in that fulfillment? What can we as a church or as individuals do to help see it fulfilled? Are we helping, or are we part of the reason we're still here? Justify your answer.
- ❸ How can we maintain a sense of the imminence of the Second Coming without getting caught up in end-time hysteria?

**Summary:** Adventists' emphasis on the Second Coming is not misguided. It originates in Jesus, our Savior and Lord, for whom it was a vital part of truth. Just before the close of His life He gave a long discourse to Peter, Andrew, James, and John, giving them and His followers in all ages a glimpse into the future. That future would bring, first of all, the fall of Jerusalem, but Christians could know when that was near and flee for their lives. After that climactic event, a long period of distress would take place, but the end would come in God's good time.

## “Jail Me Instead”

Serafina Ma’alo

Serafina and her husband, Ma’alo, live in Samoa. When they began studying with Adventists, they were amazed to learn that they had believed so much that was not based on the Bible. After Ma’alo gained victory over alcohol and tobacco addictions, the couple, along with his parents, joined the church together.

Ma’alo’s parents lived in a village that had a small congregation of believers. But the group met in a member’s home far from where they lived. Ma’alo’s father wanted to start a Branch Sabbath School closer to his home. But family members have a say in what happens on family property, and Ma’alo’s aunt objected to the family holding religious meetings on the family land.

One evening Ma’alo’s uncle became drunk and began throwing stones and shouting threats at church members. Ma’alo grabbed his uncle to prevent him from hurting anyone. The uncle accused Ma’alo of beating him up and ordered Ma’alo arrested.

Ma’alo had planned to leave the island the next day on a trip. His father begged the police to release his son. “Put me in jail instead,” his father said. The police released Ma’alo and jailed his father so that Ma’alo could leave as planned.

When villagers learned what had happened, they were impressed that Ma’alo’s father would place himself in jail in order to redeem his son who had done no wrong. Villagers began asking questions about God, and in time almost 100 people were baptized into this new congregation. The members built a traditional hall of thatched roof over cleared land, which quickly became too small for the number of people attending worship.

Eventually the village agreed to let the Adventists build a church on Ma’alo’s family property. The church membership continues to grow, even as the village decreases in population.

Serafina’s family moved to her home village, and the couple plan to start another Branch Sabbath School there. “Who knows,” Serafina said, “maybe another church will be born.”



*Serafina Ma’alo is a homemaker living in Faeapuna, Samoa.*