

Jesus' Return as King and Friend



SABBATH—JUNE 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Daniel 9:24–27; Matthew 24; Luke 21:25–31; John 14:1–3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Hebrews 9:28.

MEMORY VERSE: “In the same way, Christ was offered up once. He took away the sins of many people. He will also come a second time. At that time he will not suffer for sin. Instead, he will come to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:28, NIV).

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SECOND COMING was twisted in the Left Behind™* series of books and movies. But they captured the attention of millions worldwide. The whole series pictured God as changeable and moody. It also caused unreasonable fear (if not panic) in people's minds about the Second Coming. It was not the way the Bible wants us to think about Christ's return. In the New Testament, the return of Jesus is a glorious, very joyful event. He is our King and also our Friend.

There are unpleasant parts in connection with the Second Coming (as we will soon study). But it is not fear that will cause people to turn toward heaven. Fear is important, and we do not preach the whole truth about the Second Coming without including it. But in doing so, we should follow what the Bible clearly says. We should not cause nightmares unnecessarily. To describe the different parts of the Second Coming straight from the Bible is to create excitement in the hearts of those who care to listen in the same way children look forward to Christmas. The message of the Second Coming should be good news.

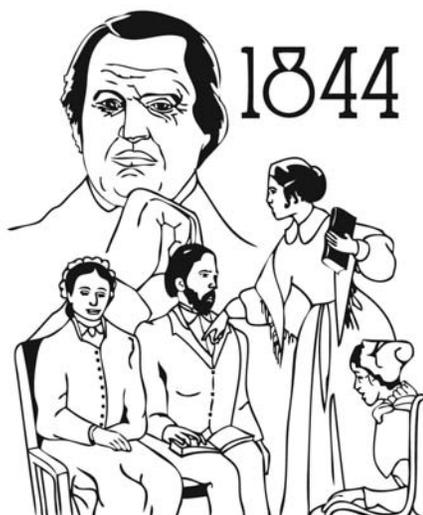
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SUNDAY—JUNE 22**WAITING IN THE OUTER COURT
(Hebrews 9:28)**

The period in which we are now living was symbolized (represented) by the Day of Atonement¹ in Israel in early Bible times. The high priest performed (did) his once-a-year ministry (work) in the Most Holy Place. The people, with bated breath, waited in the outer court for him to come out. His coming out would show the successful completion of his work for them and the removal of all sin.

Since 1844, Christ has been involved in a part of a ministry symbolized by the Day of Atonement in Israel. When that work is done, He will come out of the heavenly sanctuary² to receive His people. In the words of Hebrews 9:28: "In the same way, Christ was offered up once. He took away the sins of many people. He will also come a second time. At that time he will not suffer for sin. Instead, he will come to bring salvation³ to those who are waiting for him" (NirV).

How do Luke 12:40–48; Titus 2:11–13; and 1 Peter 1:3–8 relate to the idea of expectant waiting?



William Miller and his followers thought Jesus would come in 1844 to take them to heaven.

William Miller⁴ and his followers excitedly expected the coming of the heavenly High Priest in 1844. We know they were disappointed. But try to imagine the emotion that moved them. Here were people who loved Jesus with all they had. They felt close to Him. They wanted Him to come to take them to heaven. He was their friend. Many years later, Hiram Edson shared with us how the whole group felt. He wrote that they had "confidently [positively] hoped to see Jesus Christ and all the holy angels with Him." When that did not happen, "such a spirit of weeping came over us as I

1. Day of Atonement—a yearly event in which the earthly sanctuary (house of God) was cleansed of sin; Day of Atonement services represented a cleansing from sin and renewed relationship with God for all His people.

2. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

3. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

4. William Miller—Back in the 1830s and early 1840s, William Miller preached the coming of Jesus Christ in 1844. He started a movement of his believers who waited for Jesus' return. But Jesus did not return in 1844. This led to the Great Disappointment. After this, a group was started which led to the founding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

never experienced before. . . . We wept, and wept, till the day dawn.” —Adapted from Hiram Edson, manuscript fragment, Center for Adventist Research (from Heritage Room), James White Library, Andrews University. These believers did not breathe a sigh of relief that Jesus did not come. Instead, they were disappointed, and bitterly so.



The believers wept bitterly when Jesus did not come back in 1844.

Are you excited about the Second Coming? Do you want it soon? Or do you fear it? What are the reasons for your answers? Write them down and prayerfully examine what they say about your Christian experience.

MONDAY—JUNE 23

DEALING WITH THE FEAR PROBLEM (Matthew 26:31–33, 41)

There is a dark side to the coming of Jesus. Jesus Himself said it will be a time of sadness for the nations in Matthew 24:30, NIV. Jesus says that the event will be almost the same as

the judgments of the Flood and of Sodom (Matthew 24:37–39; read also Luke 17:26–30). Jesus speaks about final separation. He uses the example of two women grinding at the mill, with one taken, the other left (Matthew 24:40, 41). Jesus speaks of remaining watchful, and His warning could not be stronger (read verses 43–51). Peter was there at the time Jesus spoke about His coming in Matthew 24. Peter speaks of “the day of the Lord” as one of fire and terror (2 Peter 3:10–12). When John sees the event in vision, he says that “all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him” (Revelation 1:7, NIV). Revelation 6:15, 16 pictures all kinds of people at the Second Coming asking the rocks and mountains to fall on them.

What do Matthew 25:31–33, 41; 2 Thessalonians 1:6–9; and Hebrews 12:25–29 say about the Second Coming?

There are people who hurt and abuse others, who murder and steal, and who rob the treasuries of their governments. They leave millions to suffer in poverty. And then there are the good people who turn their backs on God and His kind offer of mercy and pardon. It would be very wrong of us to make those people think that the Second Coming does not mean bad news, if they do not change. With people’s eternal (forever) future depending on these issues, it would be shameful for us to “cover up” the real situation.

In what ways might a little fear do us all some good (Philippians 2:12)?

TUESDAY—JUNE 24

THE BRIGHT SIDE OF THE SECOND COMING (Luke 21:28)

As we saw in yesterday's lesson, there is a dark side to the coming of Jesus. But for the converted Christian, the scene is always bright. For in the Second Coming Jesus is both their King and their Friend. Jesus Himself encourages us to look forward to this joyful scene, no matter what may happen in the future in Luke 21:28, NIV. No heads down or dropped shoulders here! Jesus wants His followers to be hopeful and excited while waiting for the glorious day of His return.

How do John 14:1–3; Acts 1:11; Philippians 3:20, 21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; and Revelation 7: 9, 10, 13–17 strengthen our hope and joy?

Notice what Jesus does as He speaks to the snobbish religious leaders. He focuses on His coming as King and on the upcoming judgment. But when Jesus is talking about His followers, He focuses on ideas of comfort, assurance, and joy. For example, in Matthew 24:31, Jesus is talking about the mourning of the nations at His coming. Then He changes the subject to focus on His people: He says that the angels gather them from every

nation into His kingdom. And in John 14:1–3, Jesus' promise to return helps to quiet down the "troubled" hearts of His followers, to calm their nerves, and to give them hope.



When Jesus returns, the angels will gather His people up to be with Him.

If you believed, with all your heart, that Jesus was coming within the month, what moral (righteous; holy) changes would you want to make in your own life? After you think about your answer, then ask yourself, Why wait until later to make those changes? After all, might it then be a little harder to make those changes?

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 25

WHEN WILL WE MEET JESUS?— PART 1 (Matthew 24)

Matthew 24 is an important chapter on the second coming of Jesus. It records Jesus' own answer to ques-

tions raised by His disciples. These are the questions we still have today about the *when* of the Advent. Jesus focused on several points, which are listed as follows:

1. We should not be alarmed. (In the Greek, the statement is short and to the point: do not be alarmed whether by famine, by earthquake, or by conflict (war) between nations (verses 6–8, NIV).

2. We will face conflict and hate, even within the church (verses 9–13).

3. We should not be unwise and easily deceived as we wait for the Second Coming (verses 4, 5, 23–26). (Jesus spent a lot of time on this point!)

4. The gospel⁵ will be preached in the whole world before the end comes (verse 14).

5. The event will be glorious, visible, and worldwide (verse 27).

6. Several signs in the sky will show us the Advent's coming (verse 29).

7. As the end arrives, angels will gather together the faithful from all over the world (verse 31).

8. The day and hour of the Advent is known only to God (verse 36).

9. All warnings and prophecies⁶ have been given, but the Second Coming will be sudden and unexpected (verses 42–44).

One important point from the above list deals with the gospel. It says that the gospel will be preached everywhere “‘as a testimony’”⁷ to all, “‘and then the end will come’” (verse 14, NIV). This suggests that Christ's followers have an important part in the closing of human⁸ history. This means hard work on the part of each of us to advance God's kingdom where we are.

Leighton Ford tells about a prison chaplain⁹ trying to lead a prisoner to Christ in a London jail. The prisoner said, “Do you really believe what you say, Chaplain? . . . If I believed your Gospel were true, I would crawl across England on broken glass to tell men about it.”—*The Christian Persuader* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), page 29. That is the kind of feeling we need to have to spread the gospel now.

The gospel must go everywhere before Christ returns. If we are called to preach that gospel, then we ourselves have a part in working with Jesus to help make the Second Advent (Coming) happen sooner. Do we not? Yes or no? What are the challenges, opportunities (the chances), or problems that are involved for us in helping this to happen?

5. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins.

6. prophecies—messages that tell what will happen in the future.

7. testimony—what you tell to others about what God has done for you.

8. human—of, or concerning, men, women, or children.

9. chaplain—a minister (pastor) working in the army, a hospital, or a prison.

THURSDAY—JUNE 26**WHEN WILL WE MEET JESUS?—
PART 2 (John 14:1–3)**

Sunday's study discussed the Millerites¹⁰ and how they eagerly waited for the Advent (coming of Jesus) on October 22, 1844. What they and we since have discovered is that Jesus was not coming back the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year, the next decade, the next century! And here we are today. More than 160 years later, still in this world. How do we wrestle with this problem in our own minds?

One way is to focus on the truth and sureness of the event. So, it does not matter when the Second Coming takes place. We can hold on to this truth by considering who made the promise in the first place. It came from Jesus Himself, a real, historical figure. The truth that He taught has stood the test of many hundreds of years. We find this very Person (Jesus) speaking to a group of followers, who were worried about His soon death. Do not be troubled, He says to them. Trust Me (John 14:1). "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me" (verse 3, NIV).

Review the following verses. How do they help us to better understand the promise of the Second Coming? (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 40:8; Galatians 4:4; read also Daniel 9:24–27.)



God's promises always happen right on time.

The promise of the First Advent (Coming) was given way back in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). And the world was to wait thousands of years for this prophecy to be fulfilled. But as God's great, universal clock struck the right hour, angels announced to surprised shepherds on a hillside in Bethlehem: " 'Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you' " (Luke 2:11, NIV). The promise did not fail. This is because it was directly connected to the Word of the living God. And so it will be true with the second coming of Jesus.

What good was Christ's first coming if we do not have the promise of the Second Coming? The First Coming took place according to Bible prophecy. And what Jesus did on the earth for us was amazing (wonderful) beyond words. How should these events make us very sure that the Second Coming

10. Millerites—followers of William Miller who believed Jesus would return to earth in 1844.

will be real, no matter what happens?

FRIDAY—JUNE 27

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Christ had gone to heaven in human form. The disciples [followers] had seen the cloud receive Him. The same Jesus had walked and talked and prayed with them. He had broken bread with them. He had been with them in their boats on the lake. And He had that very day climbed with them up the Mount of Olivet. Now He had gone to share His Father's throne. And the angels had promised the disciples that the same One whom they had seen go up into heaven would come again even as He had gone up. . . . Well might the disciples rejoice in the hope of their Lord's return.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, “To My Father and Your Father,” page 832, in *The Desire of Ages*.

Our understanding of time is directly connected with the level of anxiety (worry) we experience in the delay of the Advent. In Western society our expectation of exact timing influences¹¹ our thinking about the event. We are told that an event will happen soon. Then our Western mind expects it to happen shortly. But, for the Eastern mind, time was not important. What was important is the fact that an event was sure to happen sooner or later.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ From about the mid-eighteenth century up through World War I, many people in the West thought that through science, reason, and technology, humans (men, women, or children) could greatly improve themselves. Evils such as war, disease, and other happenings could be removed or at least greatly limited. How different is that view from the view of the world presented by Jesus more than nineteen hundred years ago, in Matthew 24? Who was right? How should Matthew 24 help us to have faith in the promises of Christ's second coming?
- ❷ There is a hidden danger in the fact that the idea of the Second Coming has become part of our regular Adventist teaching. This can prevent us from fully sharing with others the Second Coming as a wonderful and glorious event. How can we protect ourselves from becoming so used to this wonderful event, upon which all our hopes rest?
- ❸ Look at your local church and then ask this question, Are we helping to hasten (hurry up) the second coming of Jesus? Or are we part of the reason for the delay? Discuss your answers in class.

11. influences—to have power or an effect over persons or things.