

Predictions *of the* End



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.

Key Text: *Mark 13:4*

Teachers Aims:

1. To stress the importance of Jesus' return and the end of this earth.
2. To explore how Jesus' statements on future events applied both to His day and ours.
3. To emphasize that we should look with hope to Jesus' return.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Disciples' Questions (*Mark 13:1, 2*).

- A. Jesus' disciples associated the end of the world with the fall of Jerusalem.
- B. In answering their questions, Jesus makes clear that the fall of Jerusalem was an end, but not *the* end.
- C. The seemingly random catastrophes that occur as part of end-time events advance God's plan.

II. The Fall of Jerusalem (*Mark 13:9-12*).

- A. On Jesus' authority, Daniel's abomination of desolation (*Dan. 9:27*) refers to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.
- B. The fact that the early Christians fled Jerusalem during the later siege indicates they knew and obeyed Jesus' words.
- C. The fall of Jerusalem can be viewed as the result of disobeying God.

III. The End of the World (*Mark 13:24-26*).

- A. The fall of Jerusalem symbolizes the end of the world.
- B. Not all of Jesus' statements can be taken as referring to the fall of Jerusalem. Some of them refer to the final end.
- C. While it is important to be aware of the signs of the end, it is more important to focus on Jesus' return.

Summary: As followers of Jesus, we need to take seriously the end of the world and the Second Coming. Jesus often preached about both; and both give meaning to His life and ministry. At the same time, we must focus on the here and now, because the kingdom of God is among us.

COMMENTARY

Mark 13 is one of the difficult portions of the book. Its difficulty lies in understanding Jesus' prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and His return. Events relating to the two events are placed in such a way it is hard to separate them. Historic distance from the destruction of Jerusalem and anticipation of the Second Coming should lead us only to one certainty: Just as Jesus' prediction regarding the temple came true 40 years later, so the prediction of His return will come true.

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?

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.

Our lesson deals with the disciples' question in verse 4 and Jesus' answer.

I. The Disciples' Question.

As Jesus was leaving the temple with the disciples, they expressed their wonder at the imposing structure. Herod the Great began its construction 15 years before Jesus was born; and the entire complex, occupying almost one-sixth of the city, was not finished until about A.D. 63. During Jesus' time its main structure was probably complete. Some of its stones were huge, measuring 25 by 8 by 12 feet. "The Jews were convinced of the permanence of this magnificent structure, not only because of the stability of construction, but also because it represented God's presence among them."—*Life Application Bible Commentary: Mark*, p. 370.

The awe the disciples expressed over the temple (*Mark 13:1*) prompted Jesus to say that " 'not one stone shall be left upon another' " (*vs. 2, NKJV*). This prediction caused Peter, James, John, and Andrew to ask: " 'When will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?' " (*vs. 4, NKJV*). "These things" in the first query referred to the temple's destruction. "These things" in the second question are clarified by Matthew: " 'What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' " (*Matt. 24:3, NKJV*). The second question dealt with the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and the disciples wondered whether there was a relationship between this and the destruction of the temple.

II. Jesus' Answer: On the Temple's Destruction.

Jesus' answer called for a shift in the disciples' understanding of the kingdom. While the Jewish hope of the kingdom focused on the temple and the restoration of David's throne in Jerusalem, the hope that Christ offered centered on His glorious return, the precise timing of which " 'no one knows . . . but only the Father' " (*Mark 13:32, NKJV*). Thus, the apostles described the Second Coming as the Christian's "blessed hope" (*Titus 2:13*), and it is this that dominates the book of Revelation, written some twenty years after the destruction of the temple.

Jesus' answer regarding the temple's destruction contained two cautionary notes: " 'Take heed that no one deceives you' " (*Mark 13:5, NKJV*) and " 'the end is not yet' " (*vs. 7, NKJV*). Because we can draw no clear line regarding which of these two events relates to the end of the Jewish nation as God's chosen people and which to the end of the age, it is important not to allow the crises of history to undermine our faith or cause us to speculate regarding the end of the age.

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 destruction of the temple was one of the most cruel manifestations of inhumanity and savagery. The famine, persecution, plunder, destruction, earthquakes, and death predicted in Mark caused unimaginable misery for the Jewish people. The siege and the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 left dead nearly a million Jews. The temple itself experienced one fulfillment of the “abomination of desolation” (*Mark 13:14; see also Dan. 9:27, 11:31*), when the invading Romans not only destroyed the temple but set up

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Matthew 24, Mark 13:1-36, Luke 21:5-40*

- 1 The time of the end. For many Adventists those words conjure up negative images of religious persecution, cold-blooded violence, and spiritual deception. Yet, the end result is overwhelmingly positive. Contrast the positive and negative aspects of the following human experiences that typically end gloriously and compare them with Jesus’ return: (1) getting married, (2) having a baby, (3) taking final exams, (4) building a house, (5) training for competition.
- 2 Jesus’ description of the events of the last days has warned and encouraged believers for nearly two thousand years. As you think back on the different epochs of the Christian church (apostolic, Roman, Dark Ages, Reformation, modern), what benefit do you think Christians received from these passages at each stage? How were they different, depending on the situation? How were they the same?
- 3 More important than knowing the *when* of Jesus’ return is knowing the *how* of being ready for it. What Bible promise have you claimed, and what life decisions have you made to ensure you’ll meet the Lord in peace? Is it boastful to claim to be ready for Jesus’ return?
- 4 What role, if any, do prophetic charts and graphs have on our witness as Christians who are waiting for the Lord’s return? If you could focus only on one to be prepared for Jesus’ return, would you choose (1) the Old Testament or the New Testament? (2) the Gospels or the Epistles? (3) the prophecies or the psalms? For each option, explain your choice in one sentence.
- 5 Do you believe Jesus is coming soon? Explain your definition of “soon.”

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.

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?

pagan idols on its holy precincts, and eventually, in A.D. 135, erected a temple for Jupiter.

III. Jesus' Answer: On the End of the Age.

Although the events predicted in Mark 13:6-19 had their primary application to the destruction of Jerusalem, they also are applicable to the end of the age. Jerusalem's destruction symbolizes the destruction of the world at the end of this age. As such, the church will face its own spiritual and physical calamities (*Mark 13:6, 9-13*). But Christians ought to face these as a call to be on "watch" (*vs. 9*) for "the end is not yet" (*vs. 7, NKJV*). Regarding the end, Jesus predicted several specifics:

Witnessing

Many Adventists find it difficult to talk about the end of time. Why? Perhaps it's because they're happy with life here on planet Earth. Or maybe thinking about the end of time brings vivid images of such horrible suffering and fear that it's just easier to adopt an "I'll worry about it when it happens" mentality. Living in the land of denial can be temporarily peaceful, but at some point in time, reality becomes just that—reality. When that happens and we're not prepared, it can be worse than we ever expected. Whatever the reason for not focusing on the end time and events leading up to it, if Adventists can't prepare themselves, how can others—nonbelievers—be warned in time?

Christ has given His followers a road map for the end time. He has pointed out important landmarks, detours, roadblocks, and straightaways that His people need to follow in order to navigate through to His second coming. He not only wants to have us use the road map, He expects us to share it every day of our lives with fellow travelers. They need to have an opportunity to pull over and ask for directions.

You need to create in those around you an awareness of the danger ahead. How do you do that without causing hostility or unnecessary fear? First, begin each day with prayer, committing that day to God's service. Then ask Him to give you opportunities during the day to witness to others. Ask Him to help you recognize these chances and give you the right words to speak so you encourage, not discourage; interest, not disinterest. Promise Him you will make this a priority throughout the day. He will provide the softening of the heart others will need in order to benefit from your witnessing attempts.

The unfolding of end-time events, although scary, is further proof that the salvation story is absolutely true. How blessed we are to have the road map of all time!

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?

“ **The gospel must first be preached to all the nations** ” (*Mark 13:10, NKJV*). Fulfilling this commission amid persecution and crises is a sign the end is near (*Matt. 24:14, Rev. 14:6-12*).

False christs and prophets will appear with deviant teachings, miracles, and signs, that, if it were possible, would deceive the very elect. Some of those false teachings include that Jesus will come in secret (*Mark 13:21, 22, 26*).

The nearness of the end will be marked by the persecution of the saints and cosmic upheavals affecting the sun, moon, and stars (*vss. 19, 24, 25; see also Rev. 6:12-14*). Increasing instability indicates God is about to establish His kingdom forevermore.

No one knows the time of Jesus’ coming (*Mark 13:32*). This makes time setting futile, the need for repentance crucial, and watching and waiting essential. Christ’s coming will be so unexpected there will be no time to get ready at the last moment. Therefore, be ready now (*Mark 13:34-37*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: The font that newspapers use for astounding events is called “second coming.” These are large, heavy black letters reserved for only the BIGGEST front-page news—such as the 9/11 tragedy and the assassination of a president. One day humankind will witness the great event for which the font was named! The Lord’s second coming will surely be a front-page headline event spread across the sky for every eye to see.

Thought Questions:

- ① News is BIG only when it is relevant to the person receiving it. The Second Coming will be BIG news only when it becomes relevant. How can we work toward making the Second Coming more relevant to the many who have yet to hear about Christianity?
- ② As Seventh-day Adventists, we have heard all our lives that Christ is coming soon. But in more than one hundred fifty years of preaching of His soon return, He is still not here. How can we account for the delay to a nonbeliever? Does this discount our belief in any way? Explain.

Application Question:

To constantly be on the lookout for the “signs” of His coming takes away from living for Christ today. Waiting for the Second Coming is not about recognizing the day but about being ready for the day. How do you know when and if you are ready?

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:

- ① **Read the above quote from the *Adventist Review*. What is the author saying? As a class, discuss the hope it is talking about.**
- ② **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.**
- ③ **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.