

The Second Coming of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 14:1–3; Matt. 16:27; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Matt. 24:3–14; 24:42, 44.*

Memory Text: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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 14:1–3, NKJV*).

The second coming of Jesus, mentioned more than three hundred times in the New Testament, is the capstone of our teachings. It is essential to our identity as Seventh-day Adventist Christians. The doctrine is engraved in our name, and it is a crucial part of the gospel that we are called to proclaim. Without the promise of His coming, our faith would be in vain. This glorious truth gives us a sense of destiny and motivates our missionary outreach.

It could be argued that the stretching of time beyond our expectations would undermine our belief in Jesus’ promise to return. However, this has not happened. For many, our passion for Christ’s return is stronger than ever.

This week we will review what Jesus said about “the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (*Titus 2:13, NKJV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 27.

The Promise

After the Last Supper, Jesus told the disciples that He would go to a place where, at least for now, they could not go (*John 13:33*). The thought of being separated from the Master filled their hearts with sorrow and fear. Peter asked, “‘Lord, where are You going? . . . Why can I not follow You now?’ ” (*vss. 36, 37, NKJV*). Christ knew their desire and assured them that the separation would be only temporary.

Read Christ’s promises to us in *John 14:1–3*. Apply those words to yourself. Why should they mean so much to you?

Our Lord’s pledge could not have been more emphatic. In Greek, the promise “I will come again” is in the present tense, emphasizing certainty. It could literally be translated, “I am coming again.”

Jesus has given us the certitude of His second coming. He did not say “I may come again,” but “I will come again.” Every time He mentioned His return, He referred to it in certain terms.

Sometimes we make promises we later cannot keep, even in spite of our best efforts and determination. That’s not the case with Christ. Many times He proved unmistakably that His word is trustworthy.

Referring to His incarnation, the Lord prophetically announced through David: “‘Behold, I come’ ” (*Ps. 40:7, NKJV*). And He did (*Heb. 10:5–7*). The reality of His first coming sustains the certainty of His second.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus promised a despairing father: “‘Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well’ ” (*Luke 8:50, NKJV*). And sure enough, Jairus’s daughter was made well, although she had been dead. Christ announced that three days after His own death He would rise from the grave; and He did. He promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples; and He sent Him right on time. If our Lord honored all His promises in the past, even those that, from a human perspective, seemed impossible, we can be certain that He will keep His promise to come again.

How can you keep the fire burning in your own heart for the second coming of Jesus?

The Purpose of Jesus' Second Coming

The great plan of Redemption will find its culmination in the Second Coming. Without Christ's return to this earth, His incarnation, death, and resurrection would have no effect for our salvation.

What is one of the basic reasons for the second coming of Jesus? See *Matt. 16:27*.

Life is not always fair; in fact, often it is not fair. We do not always see justice in our society. Innocent people suffer while evil ones seem to prosper. Many people do not receive what they deserve. But evil and sin will not reign forever. Jesus will come “to give to every one according to his work” (*Rev. 22:12, NKJV*).

This assertion implies that a judgment must take place prior to Christ's return. When Jesus comes, the destiny of each human being will already have been decided. Jesus clearly hinted at this investigative judgment in the parable of the wedding feast (*Matt. 22:11–13*). The fact that we are judged by works does not mean that we are saved by our works or by our own merits. Salvation is by God's grace and received by faith in Jesus (*Mark 16:16, John 1:12*), which we demonstrate by our actions.

What's important about the promise in Matthew 16:27 is that justice will be done. We just have to wait for it.

Also, at the Second Coming, those who sleep in Christ will be raised to eternal life. As we saw earlier—because we know that the dead are asleep in the grave—the promise of the Second Coming and the resurrection to eternal life that follows is especially important to us.

“Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ Throughout the length and breadth of the earth, the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 644.

How Will Jesus Come?

In His prophetic sermon, Christ expressed concern about wrong teachings in regard to His second advent, and He warned His disciples against people who would come in His name, “ ‘saying, “I am the Christ” ’ ” (*Matt. 24:5, NKJV; see also vss. 23–26*). He doesn’t want His followers to be deceived. Therefore, He clearly indicated the way in which He will come.

What does Matthew 24:27 tell us about how Jesus is going to return?

Lightning cannot be hidden or faked. It flashes and shines throughout the sky in such a way that everyone can see it. So will Jesus’ second coming be. No advertisement will be needed to call people’s attention toward it. Every human being, good and evil, saved and lost, even “they who pierced Him” (*Rev. 1:7, NKJV*), will see Him coming (*Matt. 26:64, NKJV*).

How does 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 help us understand what the Second Coming will be like?

In His second advent, Christ will be seen with all His divine glory as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (*Rev. 19:16*). In the Incarnation, the Son came alone and without any external splendor, with “no beauty that we should desire Him” (*Isa. 53:2, NKJV*). But this time He will descend with all His majesty and magnificence surrounded by “all the holy angels” (*Matt. 25:31*) and “with a great sound of a trumpet” (*Matt. 24:31*). If all that weren’t enough, the dead in Christ will rise to immortality.

If we trust the Lord regarding an event as incredible as the Second Coming, why should we not trust Him about every aspect of our lives?

When Will Jesus Come?

When Jesus said regarding the temple that “ ‘not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ ” (*Matt. 24:2, NKJV*), the disciples were astonished. “ ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ ” (*vs. 3, NKJV*), they inquired. In their thinking, the destruction of the temple would coincide with the end of history at Jesus’ return.

Jesus’ answer skillfully combined the signs for both events: the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and His second advent, because the disciples were not prepared to grasp the difference between them.

It is important for us to understand the nature and purpose of these signs. They were not given for us to determine the date of Jesus’ return, for “ ‘of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only’ ” (*vs. 36, NKJV*). Rather, the signs show the historical tendency of events in order to alert us that His coming is near, even at the doors. While we should never be date setters, we must never ignore the time we live in either.

Read Matthew 24:3–14, 21–26, 29, 37–39 (see also Mark 13 and Luke 21). What picture of the world does Jesus present here? In what ways does it fit the world in which we now live?

The most important idea Jesus wanted to impress on the disciples’ minds was that His coming is near. Actually, His entire prophetic sermon addressed the apostles as if they were to be alive when He would come (*see Matt. 24:32, 33, 42*).

In a real sense, from the personal perspective of each of us, the Second Coming is never farther away than a moment after our death. Death is a deep unconscious sleep. We close our eyes in death and, whether one year has passed or one thousand years have passed, the next thing we know is the second coming of Jesus. Thus, the idea of the nearness of Christ’s coming, which Paul, Peter, and James also shared, makes perfect sense. For each of us, individually, His coming is never more than a moment after we die.

How does this concept help us understand the “imminence” of Christ’s second coming?

Watch and Be Ready

Why is it crucial for us always to watch and be ready for Jesus' coming?

See Matt. 24:42, 44.

The keynote of Jesus' prophetic sermon is the imperative to watch, to be on alert. It doesn't mean to wait idly but to be actively vigilant, as is the owner of a house who remains diligent against any potential thief (*Matt. 24:43*). While watchfully waiting, we have a work to do, as did the faithful servant who carried out the tasks his master entrusted to him during the master's absence (*Matt. 24:45, Mark 13:34–37*).

What attitude would be fatal for us who claim to believe in the second advent of Jesus? *See Matt. 24:48–51; Luke 21:34, 35.* **How can we avoid falling into that attitude? Why is the error so easy to do if we are not careful?**

The parable of the evil servant is very sobering, especially for us as Seventh-day Adventists. This servant represents those who profess to believe that Christ will come again, but not immediately. Believing that the Lord is delayed, they think they still have time to live selfishly and indulge in sinful pleasures because, surely, there will be plenty of time to prepare for the Second Coming. Unfortunately, this idea is a deadly trap, because no one knows when Jesus will come. Moreover, even if Christ doesn't come yet, any one of us could be called to rest unexpectedly, suddenly ending our opportunity to make things right with God. But above all, repeated indulgence in sin gradually hardens and desensitizes the conscience so that it becomes more difficult to repent. The devil doesn't care that we believe theoretically in the second coming of Jesus, as long as he can make us postpone our preparation for it.

How can we be ready today? By repenting and by confessing our unconfessed sins to Jesus, by renewing our faith in His expiatory death on the cross for us, and by surrendering our wills totally to Him. Walking in communion with Him, we can enjoy the deep peace of being covered by His robe of righteousness.

How much do you think about the Second Coming? How much of its reality impacts your life? How do we strike the right balance in going about our daily work and yet living in anticipation of Christ's return?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “On the Mount of Olives,” pp. 627–636, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Heralds of the Morning,” pp. 299–316, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious, until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror. . . . With anthems of celestial melody the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng, attend Him on His way. The firmament seems filled with radiant forms—‘ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.’ No human pen can portray the scene; no mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 640, 641.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Though we need to believe in the nearness of Christ’s return, how can we avoid the dangers of fanaticism? That’s not always so easy. After all, how many fanatics really think that they are fanatics?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that the Second Coming is never far off from each one of us on a personal, individual level because our death is never really that far off, no matter how long we live. What does this idea tell us about just how close the Second Coming really is as far as we each are concerned?
- 3 How do you respond to those who mock the idea of the Second Coming? Before you respond to them, try to put yourself in their shoes, looking at things from their perspective. After you do that and see their arguments, think through ways that you can respond.
- 4 What about this idea that we, as a people, can either help hasten or delay the Second Coming? What are the arguments either way in that discussion?
- 5 If you knew that Jesus was coming next week, what in your life would change now?

“Show Us Your Church”

Ivan and Raveta grew up in the traditional church in Macedonia. After their marriage, Raveta continued attending church occasionally, though Ivan didn't.

When the Bible became available in the Macedonian language, Raveta bought a copy. But she didn't read it; she put it on a shelf and forgot it.

Years later Ivan, a lawyer, had a heart attack. While recovering, he asked Raveta for the Bible. “I know the laws of our country,” he said. “Now I want to read God's laws.” Ivan found the Ten Commandments and told Raveta that they had been disobeying God's laws all their lives. “God says we must have no other gods before Him, but we have icons in the house and at the church,” he said. “It says that God is jealous. He wants us to worship Him, not saints. And here, God says that we must keep holy the seventh day, not the first day.”

Raveta took the Bible from Ivan and began reading for herself. She read for hours a day. She threw away the icons and searched for a church that kept the Sabbath. But she couldn't find one, so the couple worshiped in their home on Sabbath. Frustrated, Raveta cried, “God, please show us Your church!”

She turned on the TV and heard a pastor speak on the Second Coming—just what they had been studying. At the end of the program the name “Seventh-day Adventist Church” flashed across the screen. Raveta called the TV station and asked for the number of the Adventist church. She called the church and told the pastor that they wanted to talk with him. He offered to come to their home.

Ivan and Raveta peppered the pastor with questions on the Ten Commandments and other Bible texts that troubled them. The pastor chuckled and explained each subject in depth.

Ivan and Raveta were satisfied that they had found the true church and began worshiping there. They shared what they were learning with Ivan's parents. They believed and joined the Adventist Church before Ivan, who struggled with tobacco. Finally he turned his habit over to God, and God gave him the victory. Ivan and Raveta were baptized together. “We

thank God for the television programs that led us to the church where God delights to dwell,” Raveta says.

Your mission offerings help support the ministry of television and radio in the small country of Macedonia, where fewer than five hundred members live today. Thank you.



RAVETA and IVAN STRATROV live in Skopje, Macedonia.

The epistle of James has been one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible. Who was James, anyway? Was he a legalist, teaching that justification is really by works instead of faith? Or was he simply providing a slightly different perspective on the subject, similar to the several perspectives on the teachings of Jesus that we find in the Gospels? The answer is, clearly, the latter, as we will discover in the fourth quarter 2014 study guide entitled, *The Book of James* by Clinton Whalen.

James had a firsthand knowledge of Jesus, and his epistle may very well be the earliest Christian writing in existence.

The epistle of James exudes confidence in the return of Jesus; it also provides crucial perspectives on the law, the judgment, and the Second Coming. Our journey this quarter spans the entire Christian era, as it includes some of the earliest preaching, as well as special insights for these last days.

Lesson 1—James, the Lord’s Brother

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **James, the Brother of Jesus** (*Mark 6:3*)

MONDAY: **James, the Believer** (*Gal. 2:9*)

TUESDAY: **James and the Gospel** (*James 2:22, 23*)

WEDNESDAY: **To the Twelve Tribes Scattered Abroad** (*Acts 11:19–21*)

THURSDAY: **James and Jesus** (*James 4:12, Matt. 7:1*)

Memory Text—*John 15:14*

Sabbath Gem: Who was James? What was his background? What had been his relationship to Jesus? And what position did he hold in the church? We will discover that this week.

Lesson 2—The Perfecting of Our Faith

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Faith Lasts** (*James 1:2, 3*)

MONDAY: **Perfection** (*James 1:4*)

TUESDAY: **Asking in Faith** (*James 1:5, 6*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Flip Side of Faith** (*James 1:7, 8*)

THURSDAY: **The Rich and the Poor** (*James 5:1–4*)

Memory Text—*Hebrews 12:2*

Sabbath Gem: We should not worry over whether or not our characters will be good enough in the end. That is God’s work. Our role is to “fight the good fight of faith” (*1 Tim. 6:12*) by keeping our eyes on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith.”

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