

# The Return of Our Lord Jesus



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Isa. 13:6, 9; Matt. 24:30, 31; Dan. 2:34, 35; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; 2 Thess. 1:7–10.*

**Memory Text:** “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (*Matthew 24:27*).

The poet T. S. Eliot began a poem with the line: “In my beginning is my end.” However succinct, his words carry a powerful truth. In origins exist endings. We see echoes of this reality in our name, Seventh-day Adventist, which carries two basic biblical teachings: “Seventh day,” for the Sabbath of the Ten commandments, a weekly memorial of the six-day Creation of life on earth; and “Adventist,” pointing to the second coming of Jesus, in which all the hopes and promises of Scripture, including the promise of eternal life, will find their fulfillment.

However distant in time the Creation of the world (our beginning) is from the second coming of Jesus (our end, or at least the end of this sinful existence), these events are linked. The God who created us (*John 1:1–3*) is the same God who will return and, in an instant, “in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (*1 Cor. 15:52, NKJV*), will bring about our ultimate redemption. In our beginning, indeed, we find our end.

This week, we will talk about the final of all final events, at least as far as our present world is concerned: the second coming of our Lord Jesus.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 30.

## The Day of the Lord

However much we tend to think of the second coming of Jesus as a New Testament teaching alone, that's not true. Of course, only after the first coming of Jesus—after His death, resurrection, and ascension—were we given a fuller and richer revelation of the truth surrounding the Second Coming. But as with so much else in the New Testament, the Old Testament reveals hints and shadows of this crucial truth long before it will happen. With the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus, the New Testament authors didn't reveal a new truth; instead, they greatly enhanced a truth that already had been revealed in the Bible. Only now, in light of the crucified and risen Savior, can the promise of the Second Coming be understood and appreciated more fully.

**Read** the following texts. What do they teach us about the second coming of Jesus? *Isa. 13:6, 9; Zech. 14:9; Dan. 12:1.*

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There is no question that the “day of the LORD” will be a day of destruction and sorrow and turmoil for the lost. But it is also a day of deliverance for all of God's people, those who are “found written in the book” (*see also Phil. 4:3, Rev. 3:5, 13:8*). This theme—that of the “day of the LORD” as a time of judgment against the wicked but also a time when God's faithful are protected and rewarded—is found first in the Old Testament. For instance, although some will face the “LORD's fierce anger,” those who heed the call to “seek righteousness” and “seek humility” will “be hidden / In the day of the LORD's anger” (*Zeph. 2:1–3, NKJV*).

**Read** Matthew 24:30, 31. In what way do these verses show this same great dichotomy between the lost and the saved at the second coming of Jesus?

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As final events unfold, the side we are on will only become more apparent. What choices can and must we make now to make sure we're on the right side?

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## Daniel and the Second Coming of Jesus

Although many Jews in the time of Jesus expected the Messiah to overthrow the Romans and establish Israel as the most powerful nation of all, that's not what the advents of Jesus, either the first or second, were to be about. Instead, God had something so much bigger in store for His faithful people than just a rearrangement of the old sinful and fallen world.

Perhaps nothing else in the Old Testament reveals as clearly as does Daniel 2 the truth that the new world does not grow out of the old one, but instead is a new and radically different creation.

Daniel 2 shows the rise and fall of four great world empires—Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and then finally Rome, which then breaks up into the nations of modern Europe. However, the statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (symbolizing the succession of these four major world powers) ends in a spectacular way. It does so in order to show the great disconnect between this world and the one that will come after the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Read** Daniel 2:34, 35, 44, 45. What do these verses teach about the fate of this world and the nature of the new one?

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These verses leave little ambiguity about what happens when Jesus returns. In Luke 20:17, 18, Jesus identified Himself with this stone, which crushed to powder all that was left of this world. The Aramaic of Daniel 2:35 says that after the gold, silver, clay, iron, and bronze were crushed, they “became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them.” That is, nothing is left of this old world after Jesus returns.

Meanwhile, the stone that destroyed all trace of this old world “became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.” And this kingdom, which arises as a result of the Second Coming, is one that “shall never be destroyed,” and “it shall stand forever” (*Dan. 2:44, NRSV*).

In other words, only one of two endings awaits every human being who has ever lived on this planet. Either we will be with Jesus for eternity, or we will disappear into nothingness with the chaff of this old world. One way or another, eternity awaits us all.

## Long-Term Prospects

**Read Titus 2:13.** What great hope do we have, and why?

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Describing his beliefs about the origins of our universe, a lecturer explained that about 13 billion years ago “an infinitely dense tiny mass popped out of nothing, and that mass exploded, and from that explosion our universe came into existence.” Just how this “infinitely dense tiny mass” could just pop out of nothing, the lecturer didn’t say. He just assumed, by faith, that it did.

Now as we noted in the introduction to this week’s lesson, in our origins we find our endings. This is why, according to this lecturer, our endings aren’t too hopeful, at least in the long run. The universe, created from this “infinitely dense tiny mass,” is doomed to eventual extinction, along with all that is in it, which includes humanity, of course.

In contrast, the biblical concept of our origins is not only much more logical than this view but also much more hopeful. Thanks to the God of origins, our long-term prospects are very good. We have so much to be hopeful for in the future, and this hope rests on the promise of Jesus’ second coming.

**Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8.** What is Paul talking about here, and in what is he putting his hope?

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Although Paul is soon to be executed, he lives in assurance of salvation and the hope of Christ’s return, which Paul calls “His appearing” (*2 Tim. 4:8, NKJV*). A “crown of righteousness” awaits him, certainly not his own righteousness (*1 Tim. 1:15*) but the righteousness of Jesus, upon which Paul knows his hope in the promise of the Second Coming rests. Regardless of his immediate circumstances, which are dismal at best (in jail, waiting to be executed), Paul knows his long-term prospects are very good. And that is because he is looking at the big picture, not focusing only on the immediate situation.

**Regardless of your own immediate circumstances, how can you have the same hope as Paul did? How can we learn to look at the big picture and the hope it offers us?**

## In the Clouds of Heaven

However central and crucial the Second Coming is, according to the Bible, not all Christians see the event as a literal, personal return of Jesus Himself. Some argue, for instance, that the second coming of Jesus occurs not when Christ Himself returns to earth but when His Spirit is made manifest in His church on earth. In other words, Christ's second coming is accomplished when the moral principles of Christianity are revealed in His people.

How thankful we can be, however, that this teaching is false. If it were true, what long-term hope would we really have?

**Read** the following New Testament texts about the Second Coming. What do they reveal about the nature of Christ's return?

Matt. 24:30 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Thess. 4:16 \_\_\_\_\_

Matt. 26:64 \_\_\_\_\_

Rev. 1:7 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Thess. 1:7–10 \_\_\_\_\_

“The firmament appears to open and shut. The glory from the throne of God seems flashing through. The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of a hurricane like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear. The seaports that have become like Sodom for wickedness are swallowed up by the angry waters. Babylon the great has come in remembrance before God, ‘to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 637.

The return of Jesus will be such a massive event that it literally will bring the world as we know it to an end. When it happens, everyone will know it, too. What Jesus accomplished for us at the first coming fully will be made manifest at the second.

**How should living with the reality of the Second Coming impact how we live now? How should it help us to remember what the really important things in life are?**

## The Living and the Dead

Before raising His friend Lazarus from the tomb, Jesus uttered these words: “ ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*). But rather than just asking people to take His word about such an incredible claim, He then proceeded to raise Lazarus from death, who had been dead long enough for the corpse to start stinking (*John 11:39*).

Those who believe in Jesus do, indeed, die. However, as Jesus said, though they may die, they will live again. This is what the resurrection of the dead is all about. And this is what makes the second coming of Jesus so central to all our hopes.

**According** to these texts, what happens to the dead in Christ when Jesus returns? *Rom. 6:5; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:42–44, 53–55.*

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The great hope of the Second Coming is that the resurrection from the dead that Jesus Himself experienced will be what His faithful followers of all the ages will experience, as well. In His resurrection they have the hope and assurance of their own.

**What** happens to those who are alive when Jesus returns? *Phil. 3:21, 1 Thess. 4:17.*

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The faithful ones alive when Jesus returns will retain a physical body, but not in its present state. It will be supernaturally transformed into the same kind of incorruptible body that the ones raised from the dead will have, as well. “The living righteous are changed ‘in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.’ At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 645.

**Make a list of all the things of this world that are so important to you that you would rather sacrifice eternal life in order to retain them. What’s on the list?**

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**Further Thought:** The second coming of Jesus isn't the epilogue, the appendix, or the afterword to the sad story of human sin and suffering in this fallen world. Instead, the Second Coming is the grand climax, the great hope of the Christian's faith. Without it, what would we have? The story of humanity just would go on and on, one miserable scene after another, one tragedy after another, until it all ends in death. Apart from the hope that Christ's return offers us, life is, as William Shakespeare wrote, "a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing." And yet, we have this hope because the Word of God confirms it for us, again and again. We have this hope because Jesus ransomed us with His life (*Mark 10:45*), and Jesus is indeed coming back to get what He paid for. The stars in the heavens don't speak to us of the Second Coming. The birds chirping in the trees don't herald it. In and of themselves, these things might point to something good, something hopeful, about reality itself. But they don't teach us that one day, when Jesus returns, "the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (*1 Cor. 15:52, NKJV*). They don't teach us that one day we will look up and " 'see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven' " (*Mark 14:62, NKJV*). No, we know these things because they have been told to us in the Word of God, and we trust in what the Word promises us.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about what it would mean if the second coming of Jesus really were nothing more than what some believe it is: the full expression of Christian principles in the lives of Christ's followers. However wonderful a display that would be, why, in the end, does it leave us without any hope?
- 2 Why is the currently popular idea that the universe arose from nothing such a silly idea? Why would people promote such a notion, and why do some believe it? Why is belief in an eternally existing God, who created all things, so much more logical and rational an explanation for the universe?
- 3 Share with your class the things you put on a list of what you find so important in this life that you would sacrifice the hope of eternity in order to keep them. What can you learn from one another about the contents of the lists? If people have nothing on their lists, how can we make sure, then, that nothing in our lives is truly keeping us from salvation, as will be the case with many people?

## “Hunter of Souls”

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Danny Whatley was on top of the world—and not just because he worked as a bush pilot in the U.S. state of Alaska.

Danny owned a thriving tour company that offered private hunting trips to the world’s movers and shakers. Clients included Citibank’s president and the Rockefeller family.

“I wanted to be in the elite,” Danny said. “I did not want to be a regular person. I loved those people.”

But then he received a copy of *The Great Controversy*. Danny had dated a former Seventh-day Adventist and through her started playing basketball and volleyball at the Adventist church in his hometown, Palmer. A church member gave him the book.

Danny took the book with him on his next bush trip and read how the seventh-day Sabbath was changed to Sunday. He never had heard of author Ellen G. White, but he instantly felt convicted that this was truth.

Back in Palmer, Danny was preparing for the hunting season when church members invited him to an evangelistic series. The opening presentation about the Daniel 2 prophecy captivated him.

“I was hooked right away,” he said. “People who say evangelism doesn’t work have never been on the receiving end of an evangelism series.”

The next night, Danny brought his father.

When the preacher, Vern Snow, spoke about baptism one night, a battle broke out in Danny’s mind. He didn’t want to lose clients because of the Sabbath.

“The battle went on for the whole meeting,” Danny said. “At the end, I had to make a decision. I went to Vern and said, ‘I want to be baptized.’”

At that moment, he surrendered everything, including his business, to Jesus.

“I was a hunting guy who could do it all on my own, and now I realized that I could not do it all on my own,” he said.

At the baptism, the pastor declared, “Here is a trophy hunter who is now a hunter of souls.”

Danny’s father and stepmother were baptized the following Sabbath. Other people also have joined the church through Danny’s influence.



At work, Danny told clients that they could no longer hunt on Saturdays. Instead, he said, they could enjoy the day in nature at no cost. With trips costing \$1,500 a day, clients happily embraced the new pricing plan.

Two years later, Danny sold his flourishing business. He also lost his desire to be in the elite.

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*“I had wanted to travel like them,” said Danny (pictured left), today a successful serial entrepreneur. “But now I go on mission trips, which are much better.”*

Many historians believe the three most crucial decades in world history occurred when a small group of men, mostly Jews under the power of the Holy Spirit, took the gospel to the world. Acts is an account of those crucial decades, which spanned from Jesus' resurrection in A.D. 31 to the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 62. Acts deals with the formative period of the early church, in which there was considerable growth. This can be seen in the way the church dealt with questions concerning the time of Jesus' second coming, the status of the Gentiles, and the role of faith for salvation. What the early church accomplished in such a short period of time stands as a perpetual testimony of what God can do through those who humble their hearts in prayer, live beyond individual differences, and let themselves be used by the Spirit for God's honor and glory. This quarter's guide, *The Book of Acts* by Wilson Paroschi, examines the story of those called by God to start the work. We will reflect on what we, those who have been called by God to finish the work, can learn from their story.

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## Lesson 1—You Will Be My Witnesses

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Restoration of Israel** (*Acts 1:6, 7*)

MONDAY: **The Disciples' Mission** (*Acts 1:8*)

TUESDAY: **He Will Come Again** (*Acts 1:9–11*)

WEDNESDAY: **Preparing for Pentecost** (*Acts 1:12–14*)

THURSDAY: **The Twelfth Apostle** (*Acts 1:21, 22*)

**Memory Text**—*Acts 1:8, NRSV*

**Sabbath Gem:** The disciples are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower and lead them on a mission that would reach the ends of the earth.

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## Lesson 2—Pentecost

### The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Coming of the Spirit** (*Acts 2:1–3*)

MONDAY: **The Gift of Tongues** (*Acts 2:5–12*)

TUESDAY: **Peter's Sermon** (*Acts 2:22–32*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Exaltation of Jesus** (*Acts 2:33–36*)

THURSDAY: **The Firstfruits** (*Acts 2:38, 39*)

**Memory Text**—*Acts 2:32, 33, NRSV*

**Sabbath Gem:** Following Jesus' ascension and His exaltation in heaven, this outpouring of the Spirit was a supernatural event that transformed the apostles from simple and obscure Galileans into men of conviction and courage who changed the world.

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