

# Chapter 1

## “When will this happen and what will be the sign?”

Matthew 24:3

The risen Christ ascended into heaven 40 days after he left death and the grave behind on Easter Sunday morning. The angels promised the disciples that Jesus would come back just as they had seen him go in the flesh. When can we expect him? Christians have been asking that question ever since.

### ***WE ARE BOUND BY TIME***

Time! How often in one day do we check the time? We wear the time on our wrists. We have clocks in nearly every room. We have a small timepiece in the corner of our computers. Our cell phones carry accurate time as well. We've all been told to take our time, tried to buy time, been in the nick of time, and taken time out. Our lives are built around the reality of time. How difficult it is then to imagine that the Lord exists outside the limits of time.

The Bible gives us significant information about the last days. The one thing the Bible does not do is tell us when the final day will be. Just as we do not know the time of our deaths, so we cannot determine the time of Christ's return.

On the fourth day of creation, God set in motion the sun, moon, and stars. These were intended not only to give light to the earth. They also set time in motion. When the Lord returns, the sun, moon, and stars will be destroyed, thus putting an end to the restraints of time.

• *Genesis 1:14* “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and **let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years.**

• *Matthew 24:29* “Immediately after the distress of those days **‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’**”

Peter addressed the question of when the end time will come. He explained that the Christian can expect mockery from those who do not believe in God’s assurance that there will be an end to this world. Peter mentioned that the Lord’s timetable is beyond any human comprehension.

• *2 Peter 3:3-14* “First of all, you must understand that **in the last days scoffers will come**, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, **‘Where is this “coming” he promised?** Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.** The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

“Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

## **THE FIRST AND SECOND APPOINTED HOUR**

The Son of God bodily came into this world the first time as a baby born in Bethlehem. Micah prophesied exactly where the Savior would be born. Isaiah foretold he would be born of a virgin, and David wrote in Psalm 132 that the Savior would be one of his descendants and sit on his throne forever. Many Old Testament prophecies were spoken concerning the birth of Jesus. Yet the prophets never mentioned one point. The prophets did not predict the exact time of his arrival.

- *Micah 5:2* “**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.**”

- *Isaiah 7:14* “**Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**”

- *Psalm 132:11* “**The Lord swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: ‘One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.’**”

- *Galatians 4:4,5* “**When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.**”

Just as the prophets of the Old Testament had no idea when Christ would come the first time, so the New Testament writers did not know the exact time Jesus would come again. We call Jesus’ return the second advent. *Advent* comes from a Latin word that means “to come.” Jesus will come again in all his glory and majesty as true God and true man to judge the living and the dead. Like the prophets of old, Jesus did not reveal the appointed hour he would come, so people would watch and be prepared at all times. We are prepared when we believe in Jesus as our Savior.

Some have attempted to figure out exactly when Jesus will come again. The Bible commands us not to do that.

• *Luke 17:20,21* “**The kingdom of God does not come with careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.**”

• *Acts 1:7* “**It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.**”

The following are but a few of the calculating seers who have misled people.

**1836: Johann Bengel, a German Lutheran, devised a numerical formula that predicted the end of the world.**

**March 21, 1843: William Miller, a Seventh Day Adventist, became so prominent in predicting the end times that the dates were called Millerisms.**

**1874: Charles Russel, founder of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, predicted many “ends” from 1914 to 1994. Not one was accurate.**

**(Some have set other dates such as 2010, December of 2012, 2016, 2034, and September of 2047.)**

• *Matthew 24:36* “**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**”

• *Matthew 24:44* “**So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect him.**”

• *1 Thessalonians 5:1,2* “**Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that **the day of the Lord will come like a****

*thief in the night.”*

In the previous passages, notice carefully that although the Bible has not revealed the exact time, it does not mean that the end of the world is indefinite. God clearly reveals that he has appointed an exact day, date, hour, and time. (See the underlined words in the above passages.)

After the gospel has gone out into the world and the Holy Spirit has called together those who are already part of the church, Jesus Christ will return. Every person will see him. Every person will know who he is. For believers, seeing our Lord will be the fulfillment of daily expectation. It will be a day of great joy. For unbelievers, the sight of Jesus, whom they did not expect to see, will fill their hearts with great fear and trembling.

- *Matthew 24:30* “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and **all the nations** of the earth will mourn. **They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.**”

We cannot tell when the end of time will be. We do know it will be connected with the spreading of God’s Word throughout the world. At Christ’s ascension he instructed us to take the gospel into all the world. Several times Scripture says that when the Word has reached the far corners of the world, the time will be ready for the final judgment. How interesting that we live in the age of the computer, a device that has the ability to carry God’s Word to the most remote corners of the earth.

- *Matthew 24:14* “This gospel of the kingdom will be **preached in the whole world** as a testimony to all nations, and **then the end will come.**”

- *Mark 13:10* “**The gospel must first be preached to all nations.**”

- *Revelation 14:6* “Then I saw another angel flying in midair. And he had the

*eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.”*

## **CONDITIONS ON THE EARTH AT THE END**

Jesus gives us two examples of conditions on earth when he returns. Both examples are well documented in his Word. Both serve as warnings.

The end will come without any specific advance notice. It will be just another day filled with life's normal activities.

• *Luke 17:26-30 “**Just as it was in the days of Noah**, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all!*

*“**It was the same in the days of Lot**. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom , fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.*

*“**It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.**”*

Those days also show the utter depths to which society can stoop. But are the days we live in any different? Consider a society that tolerates the sexual perversions that we see in our streets, our entertainment, and our court systems. Lewdness, homosexuality, and all kinds of perversions are not only rampant, but their acceptance is now argued in our courts and taught in our classrooms, not to mention the brutal slaughter of our own unborn children.

[Noah's time]

• *Genesis 6:1-5 “When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, **and they married any of them they chose. . . .***

*“The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.*

*“The Lord saw how **great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.**”*

[Lot’s time]

• *Jude 1:7 “In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.”*

## ***SIGNS OF THE END***

The New Testament provides information about the days prior to Jesus’ return. We have seen that the second coming of Christ is imminent. Imminent means it can come at any time. Jesus gives us the most information about the signs of the end of the world in his own words. Matthew has recorded them in his gospel.

Some of the signs take place as the day of the Lord draws nearer. Others take place at the same time Jesus returns. The Holy Spirit has preserved these words for us in the Bible. We know that these signs of the end are nothing to fear. The signs are a warning that Christ is coming soon and we should not grow careless in our watchfulness. The signs tell us something wonderful is about to happen, just like labor pains tell a mother she is about to give birth to her long-awaited child.

Have these signs already been fulfilled? Many have. However, God has scheduled these signs so that no one can compute when the exact day of judgment will come. God gave us these hints of the end times not to calculate the exact moment but, rather, to encourage his people to be watchful.

[Signs today]

• *Matthew 24:4-14 “Jesus answered: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. For **many will come in my name, claiming, “I am the Christ,” and will deceive***

*many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.*

*“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

[Signs when Christ comes]

- *Matthew 24:29,30 “Immediately after the distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”*

- *Matthew 24:38,39 “For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ”*

(Reference Luke 21.)

In writing to Timothy, Paul also addressed the end times with a description of life in the last days. His description certainly sounds like life today.

- *2 Timothy 3:1-5 “Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving,*



*slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”*

At Jesus’ ascension the disciples stared up into the sky where the cloud had hidden their Lord and Savior from sight. The angels told the disciples to get on with their lives while they watched and waited for Christ’s return.

## ***THE CHURCH IN THE END TIMES***

Just as there will be a decline in the conditions within society as the return of Christ draws near, so there will be increasing problems within the church. This is not to say the church will become less enthusiastic in its mission. There may even be an increase in activity within the church. However, that activity will be void of true Christian spirituality. These verses describing the church in the end times serve as a warning and a comfort—a warning to show Christians the importance of knowing the Scriptures well so they can discern between false teachings and the truth of the gospel, and a comfort in the knowledge that Jesus will indeed return for the faithful.

- *Matthew 24:10,11,24,25 “At that time **many will turn away from the faith** and will betray and hate each other, and many **false prophets will appear and deceive many people**. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. . . .*

*“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to **deceive even the elect**.”*

- *1 Timothy 4:1 “The Spirit clearly says that in **later times some will abandon the faith** and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”*

- *2 Timothy 4:3,4 “The time will come when **men will not put up with sound doctrine**. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **They will turn***

*their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”*



*Time's clock is striking the hour,  
Jesus will soon descend,  
Clothed in the garments of power,  
The reign of sin to end.  
Then will this anthem be ringing  
Like to a mighty flood,  
Then 'round the throne we'll be singing,  
Glory and praise to God.  
(Thoro Harris, 1918)*