

When and How Will Jesus Christ Return to the Earth?

*There are two major events that signal the beginning of the end,
the Great Tribulation and the return of Christ.*

During Jesus' three and one-half year ministry, He taught the disciples that He was going to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and that they would rule with Him. Consequently, some disciples thought that after Jesus was raised from the dead He would establish the kingdom immediately (Acts 1:6). However, it was not until the resurrected Christ had appeared to the disciples for forty days that they first began to realize that He would ascend to heaven and then come *again*—a second time—to establish the Kingdom of God.

Later, the apostles realized that Jesus was not going to return until God's *set time* in the future, as shown by what Peter preached after he and John had performed a miraculous healing of a crippled man: "Therefore, repent and be converted in order that your sins may be blotted out, so that *the* times of refreshing may come from *the* presence of the Lord; and *that* He may send Him Who was before proclaimed to you, Jesus Christ, **Whom *the* heaven must indeed receive until *the* times of restoration of all things, of which God has spoken by *the* mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began**" (Acts 3:19-21). Still, the disciples did not know *how* or *when* this would happen.

After decades of preaching and teaching and watching events lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the apostles began to understand that Jesus was going to return in the *distant* future. It was not until the apostle John received the Revelation of God the Father from Jesus Christ, in approximately 95 AD, that a sequence of prophetic events was unveiled to show *how* and approximately *when* Jesus was to return. However, Revelation was given to John in such a manner that it was nearly impossible to fathom the book at the time he wrote it. Even today, the majority of people cannot understand the Bible, let alone the book of Revelation. Indeed, many scholars and learned theologians have, down through the centuries, tried and failed.

Scholars generally recognize that many of the prophecies of the book of Daniel provide vital keys to the prophecies of Revelation. Likewise, Revelation provides the keys to unlock the hidden meanings of Daniel. But even Daniel did not understand the meaning of what he had been given: " 'But you, O Daniel, **shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end** [when it would be *unsealed*]. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased' " (Dan. 12:4). Again, in verses 8-10, "And I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, 'O my lord, what shall be the end of these things?' And he said, 'Go your way, Daniel, **for the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end**. Many shall be purified, and made white, and refined. But the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, **but the wise shall understand.**' "

Indeed, God informed Daniel that the prophecies were *only* to be understood **at the time of the end**. Until then, they would be closed and sealed. Moreover, in the end times, the understanding of these prophecies will be given only to those who truly love and obey God the Father and Jesus Christ, and have the Holy Spirit.

As a result, from the time the apostles, many have *tried* and *failed* to understand the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation—setting down numerous false predictions. Why have so many been so wrong about the return of Jesus Christ? **Because it was not to be understood until the time of the end—the actual end, not an “apparent” end as seen through the eyes of men as they misinterpret Scripture!**

Many signs that Jesus said would precede His return have occurred over and over again

since the first century AD—such as false prophets, wars, rumors of wars, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, persecutions and martyrdom. But there are *two major events* that signal the beginning of the end, the Great Tribulation and the return of Jesus Christ.

No. 1—The “abomination that makes desolate” must *stand* in the holy place

Jesus was very specific in describing this event, because the Great Tribulation of the end cannot begin until the Temple in Jerusalem has been rebuilt and the “abomination of desolation” stands in the holy place. Notice what Jesus warned: “Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (the one who reads, let him understand)... For then shall there be great tribulation, such as has not been from *the beginning of the world* until this time, nor ever shall be *again*” (Matt. 24:15, 21).

The parenthetical phrase “the one who reads, let him understand” was not actually spoken by Jesus. Rather, John was inspired to *add* the phrase. In 95 AD, when John wrote the book of Revelation, the Temple had already been destroyed—back in 70 AD. Yet, no “abomination of desolation” had stood in the holy place. Also, in the prophecy of the two witnesses in Revelation 11, John was given a vision of the Temple in Jerusalem. So he knew that *before the end would come* the Temple had to be rebuilt. This is why God inspired him to add the phrase in Matthew 24—to let us know that the end cannot come until the Jews rebuild the Temple.

John also knew from the apostle Paul’s second epistle to the Thessalonians that the “abomination of desolation” would be in the person of the Antichrist, proclaiming that he himself was God: “Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken in mind, nor be troubled—neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by epistle, as if from us, *saying* that the day of Christ is present. **Do not let anyone deceive you by any means because *that day will not come unless the apostasy shall come first, and the man of sin shall be revealed—the son of perdition, the one who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is an object of worship; so that HE COMES INTO THE TEMPLE OF GOD and sits down as God, proclaiming that he himself is God!***”

Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And now you understand what is holding *him* back in order for him to be revealed in his own set time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already working; only *there is* one Who is restraining at the present *time* until it arises out of *the* midst. **And then the lawless one will be revealed (whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and will destroy with the brightness of His coming); even the one whose coming is according to *the inner working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders*, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in those who are perishing because they did not receive the love of the truth, so that they might be saved. And for this cause, God will send upon them a powerful deception that will cause them to believe *the lie*, so that all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but who took pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thess. 2:1-12).**

This is the end-time “abomination” that makes desolate! As these passages tell us, the Antichrist—the “Beast” of Revelation 13—must appear in a new Temple of God *before* the return of Christ. This key event, which triggers the Great Tribulation, must occur first!

No. 2—The *sign* of the Son of Man in heaven

While the first event originates from the efforts of men, the second event to signal Christ’s return comes directly from Jesus Himself some time after the Great Tribulation has begun. As we will see from the Scriptures, this colossal event is of gigantic proportions, occurring

over a period of time. While it *begins* at a set time, it is not a single day's event. **This event is part of the sixth seal of Revelation six—the heavenly signs!** When Jesus opens the sixth seal, He dramatically reveals Himself by an awesome display of power. The whole world will know it and see it—but they won't believe it! “And when He opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as *the hair of sackcloth*, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its untimely figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. **Then the heaven departed like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.** And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the powerful men, and every bondman, and every free *man* hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us, and hide us from *the* face of Him Who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, because **the great day of His wrath has come**, and who has the power to stand?’ ” (Rev. 6:12-17).

The prophet Haggai wrote of this event: “For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Once *again*—it is yet a little while—I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. **And I will shake all the nations**; and the desire of all nations [Jesus Christ] shall come” (Haggai 2:6-7). Now notice Isaiah's similar prophecy: “And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth for fear of the LORD and for the glory of His majesty, **when He arises to shake terribly the earth.** In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made *each one* for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD and for the glory of His majesty, **when He arises to shake terribly the earth**” (Isa. 2:19-21).

The heavens, the earth, the oceans and all nations will be shaken! Such an event has never happened in the history of mankind. Everyone will experience it! But what, exactly, will people *see* as they look into the heavens?

Jesus Himself told His disciples how these events would unfold, beginning with the start of the Great Tribulation: “For then shall there be great tribulation [it begins when the “abomination of desolation” stands in the holy place], such as has not been from *the* beginning of the world until this time, nor ever shall be *again*. And if those days were not limited [to three and one-half years], there would no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be limited. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here *is* the Christ,’ or, ‘*He is there,*’ do not believe *it*. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and they shall present great signs and wonders, in order to deceive, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have foretold *it* to you. **Therefore, if they say to you, ‘Come and see! He is in the wilderness’; do not go forth. ‘Come and see! He is in the secret chambers’; do not believe it**” (Matt. 24:21-26). Clearly, Jesus is not coming as an ordinary man. Rather, He is coming in *power* and *glory* as God and King to *rule* the world!

When we combine Revelation 6:12-17—concerning the heavens rolling back as a scroll—with the following passages of Matthew 24, we can begin to understand the awesome and fearful power of the sixth seal. “**For as the light of day** [the sun], which comes forth from *the* east and shines as far as *the* west, **so also shall the coming of the Son of man be....** But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. **And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven**; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and **they shall see the Son of man coming** upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:27-30). Luke records additional details (Luke 21:25-26).

When the heavens roll back as a scroll, the entire world will suddenly see what appears to be a *new* sun, never before observed in the heavens. It will shine, as does the sun, from east to west—but it will appear to arise from somewhere beyond our solar system. This will be alarming, indeed! It will be **the sign of the coming of the Son of man!** From these passages we can

see that the return of Jesus Christ does *not* take place in a single day; rather, for *over a year* the whole world will *continue to see the sign* of the Son of Man—the new “sun” shining in the heavens—as Jesus comes closer and closer to the earth.

As final end-time events unfold with the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the dead in Christ Jesus will be raised to immortality. Next, those who are alive will be changed and caught up into the clouds by angels to meet Christ on a great “sea of glass” (Rev. 11:15-19; I Thess. 4:13-17; Matt. 24:30-31; Rev. 14:14-16; Rev. 15:2-4).

Finally, the nations gathered at Armageddon to fight against Christ are utterly defeated (Rev. 16:16-21), and Christ and His new bride, the Church, establish the Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 19:1-21; 20:4-6).

The world is then poised for a *new beginning!* Indeed, we—as the resurrected, immortal children of God—will help Jesus Christ rescue this world from sin, corruption and vanity: “Now if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be **glorified together with Him**. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation itself is **awaiting the manifestation of the sons of God**; because the creation was subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who subjected *it* in hope, **in order that the creation itself might be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God**” (Rom. 8:17-21).

Thus, the prophecies concerning the return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the saints and the establishment of the Kingdom of God are fulfilled—and the glorious one thousand-year reign of God begins.