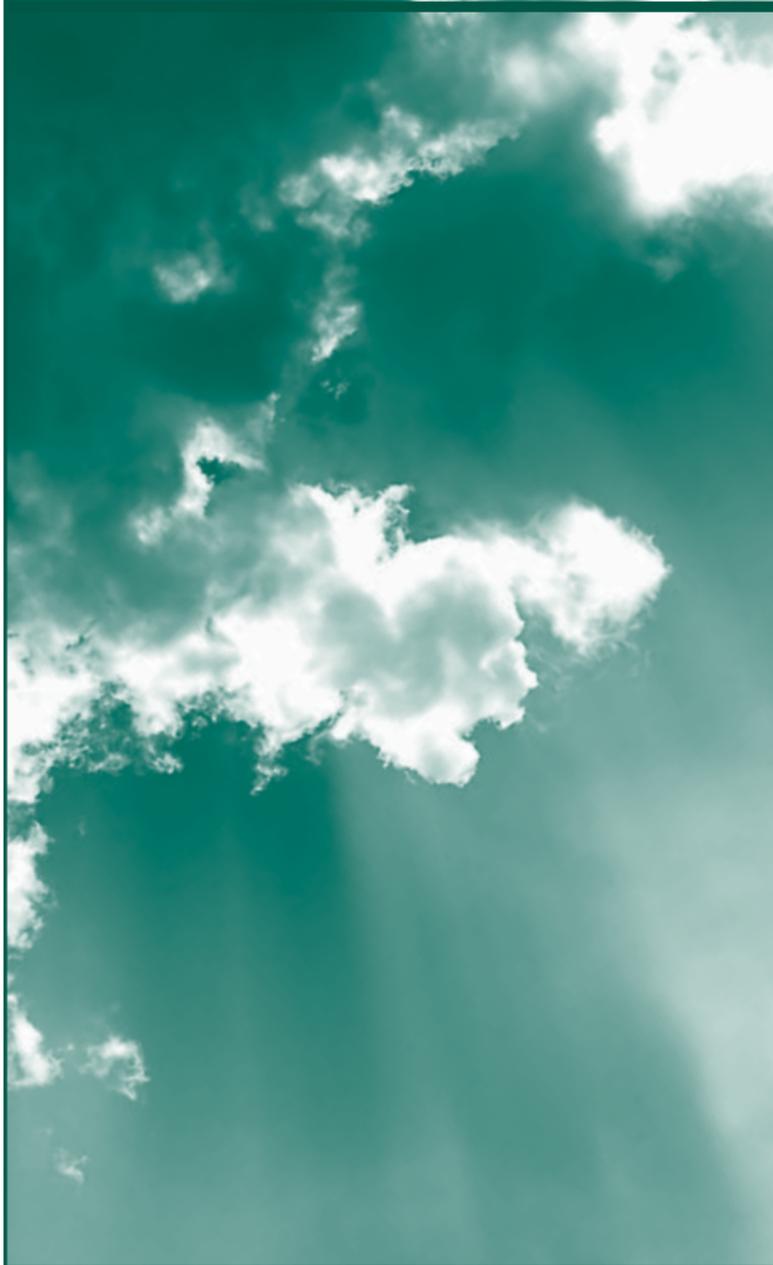


*Tell Me About*  
**THE RETURN  
OF CHRIST**



**ARLO F. NEWELL**

## *Tell Me About*

# **THE RETURN OF CHRIST**

Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2–3).

Jesus is coming again! Then sin will be ultimately defeated. Sickness, sorrow, and death will be no more. Wrongs will be made right, justice will be handed down, and Christ will rule in love and mercy.

Christ’s return is the “blessed hope” of Christians both past and present (Titus 2:13). More than Christian optimism or a feel-good faith, it is our hope for this life and the life to come. “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19).

Believing that Christ would return inspired the first Christians to “purify themselves, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). Jesus told them, “About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matt 24:36). He said he would return at an “unexpected hour” (Matt 24:44). Because we do not know when Christ will come, the question now, as then, is, When?

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the same answers to these questions: When will this be, and what will be the sign

of your coming? (See Matt 24:3; Mark 13:3–4; Luke 21:7.) Knowing that there would be antichrists and false prophets, Jesus sounded a word of caution: “Beware that no one leads you astray” (Matt 24:4).

Our hope is not found in false preachers who attempt to interpret prophecy. Our hope is in Christ. Two events must take place before his return:

1. A falling away of the faithful (2 Thess 2:3).  
“Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first.”
2. The gospel is preached to the ends of the earth (Matt 24:14; see also Mark 13).  
“And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.”

Being aware of these two events to come, the disciples received the Great Commission to evangelize while there was yet time: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19–20). Christ’s return will follow the evangelization of the world by the church.

## **SPECULATION**

The early church waited expectantly and impatiently for the return of the Lord. Some even expected his return in their own lifetime. History reveals that such speculation can give rise to doubters and religious charlatans. “In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts and saying, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!’” (2 Pet 3:3–4).

We too want specific answers about Christ’s return. Self-styled preachers still exploit natural disasters, wars, famines, and violence to try to gain credibility as prophets of the end time. Evidence of this is the popularity of the Left Behind fiction series. The writers capitalized on an erroneous teaching referred to as the “rapture” (a term not found in the Bible). “Do not believe it,” Jesus said. “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matt 24:23–24).

## **CLARIFICATION**

Because of this confusion regarding the return of Christ, every believer needs to know what the Bible teaches about the second coming. End-time fiction tends to have a little truth mixed with much make-believe. Tragically, many of us read more fictional literature than we do the Bible. In so doing, we fail to know what Scripture plainly says about the return of

the Lord. It is vital that we know how to share and defend this blessed hope.

“Always be ready to make your defense [give a reason] to anyone who demands [asks] from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3:15–16). Biblical teaching is not to be stated or shared arrogantly, with a holier-than-thou attitude, but in kindness and love. The Bible says that Christ will return...

...*Suddenly*. “As the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt 24:27).

...*Unexpectedly*. “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (Matt 24:44). “You yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night...there will be no escape!” (1 Thess 5:2–3).

...*Personally*. “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come again in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

...*Visibly*. “Look! He is coming with clouds; every eye will see him...” (Rev 1:7).

...*Audibly*. “The Lord himself, with a cry of command [shout], with the archangel’s

call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven" (1 Thess 4:16).

...*Victoriously*. "Death has been swallowed up in victory...thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:54, 57).

...*Eternally*. We will then "meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess 4:17).

These eight references help us to see more clearly the truth of the event. There will be no secret rapture, for every eye shall see him and every ear shall hear him in that Day of the Lord. Victory has already been won in the struggle against evil, so there needs to be no great military confrontation against evil (i.e., a Battle of Armageddon) before Christ returns (see Eph 6:12). There will be one general resurrection of the dead when he comes (1 Thess 4:16–17), which leaves no time for a seven-year tribulation period or an earthly millennial reign.

Christ ushered in his kingdom at his first advent, and at his return, "he hands over the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor 15:24). This spiritual kingdom is "not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17) and is an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:33).

## PREPARATION

Knowing these things, the apostle Peter asks, What sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness as you wait for the second coming (1 Pet 3:10–12)? What kind of lives should we live in preparation for this great and terrible Day of the Lord (2 Cor 5:10)?

First, we need to know that we are saved. “Confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never stumble” (2 Pet 1:10). We can have the assurance that our sins are forgiven through faith.

Second, we need to walk in the light of God’s truth. If we “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7), we will have full assurance of our destiny at the end of the age.

Third, we need to live expectantly. We need to stay spiritually alert and pray (Matt 26:41), doing God’s will, fulfilling his purpose until he comes again.

Finally, we need to wait patiently. By our patient endurance we will be ready when he comes (Luke 21:19).

*And, Lord, haste the day when my faith  
shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll:  
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall  
descend,  
“Even so” it is well with my soul.*

—Horatio G. Spafford  
“It Is Well with My Soul”

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