

The Return of the King

1) Is Jesus Christ coming back to earth?

A) Yes, Jesus Christ is coming back to earth! Though He is spiritually present in the hearts of believers now, the day is coming when He will physically return to earth and rule the world from the city of Jerusalem in Israel.

B) Jesus' return—the return of the King—is often called the “Second Coming” or the “Second Advent.”¹ These terms are used to distinguish Jesus' first coming as the lowly baby of Bethlehem (His incarnation) from His second coming as the mighty and glorious Son-of-God-in-power (cf. Rom 1:4; Rev 1:12–18).

(1) Another word that refers to the Second Coming is *parousia*. This is a Greek word meaning “coming, arrival,” and it is used in several passages to refer to Christ's return (cf. 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; Jam 5:7; 2 Pet 3:4).

2) How do we know that Jesus is coming again?

A) Jesus told us He would return:

(1) “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matt 16:27, ESV).

(2) “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” (Luke 21:25–27, ESV; cf. Mark 13:26).

(3) “He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20, ESV).

¹ The terms “Second Coming” and “Second Advent” are not direct quotes from Scripture. They were coined by theologians and scholars as a way to refer exclusively to Christ's coming return.

B) The angels said He would return:

(1) “And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:10–11, ESV).

C) The apostles said He would return:

(1) Paul – “so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming (parousia) of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” (1 Thess 3:13, ESV).

(2) James – “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming (parousia) of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:7–8, ESV).

(3) Peter – “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Pet 3:10, ESV).

D) The prophets said He would return:

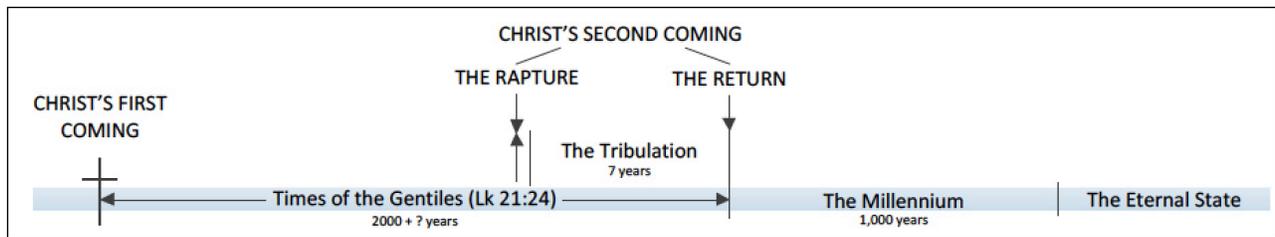
(1) Enoch – “It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him’” (Jude 1:14–15, ESV).

(2) Daniel – “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13–14, ESV; cf. Mark 13:26; 14:62).

(3) Zechariah – “On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him” (Zech 14:4–5, ESV).

3) What are the two phases of the Second Coming?

A) The Scripture passages that mention the Second Coming indicate that there are two distinct stages or phases to Christ's return. The first stage, called the Rapture, is when Christ returns in the air for His church (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 4:16–17). The second and final stage, called the Return, is when Christ returns to earth with His church and establishes His thousand-year (Millennium) reign² (1 Thess 3:13; Rev 19:11–20:6).



B) The Rapture.

(1) The Rapture is the first phase of the Second Coming—Jesus Christ will descend from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (1 Thess 4:16).

(a) First, the bodies of believers who have died will be resurrected as new spiritual bodies and reunited with their spirits (1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:42, 52; cf. 2 Cor 5:6–8; Phil 1:21–24).

(b) Next, the bodies of believers who are still alive will be changed into new spiritual bodies. They will never have to experience physical death (1 Cor 15:52).

² Don't misunderstand—Jesus' kingdom is eternal (cf. Isa 9:7). However, the first thousand years of Christ's reign (called the Millennium) take place on this present, fallen earth. At the end of the Millennium, there will be one final rebellion led by Satan (Rev 20:7–10). Jesus will crush this rebellion and throw Satan into the lake of fire. Then there will be a new heaven and a new earth, "for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" (Rev 21:1, ESV). The rest of Christ's reign will take place on this new earth and it will never end.

(c) Then, all believers will be taken up (lit. “to seize, to catch up”³) into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17).

(2) The Rapture is a future, signless and imminent event. It is future, meaning it has not yet taken place. It is signless, meaning no sign must precede its occurrence. It is imminent, meaning it could take place at any moment. Unlike the Return, there is no prophecy that must be fulfilled before the Rapture can occur—it can happen now.

(3) The Rapture will be covered in more detail in a separate lesson. For now, it is enough to understand that the Rapture is the first stage of the Second Coming and will take place prior to Christ’s physical return to earth.

C) The Return.

(1) The Return is the second and final phase of the Second Coming—it is the visible, physical and glorious return of Jesus Christ to earth with His church.

(2) The Return is a future, signed and non-imminent event. It is future, meaning it has not yet taken place. It is signed, meaning certain prophecies and signs must precede its occurrence (cf. Matt 24:4–14). It is non-imminent, meaning it will take place after the Tribulation and in connection with the Campaign of Armageddon (Rev 16:14, 16; 19:11–21; Zech 12–14).

4) *What will happen when Jesus returns?*⁴

A) Christ will defeat the Antichrist. At the end of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will gather his forces together in the plain of Megiddo (the Jezreel Valley).⁵ He will attack Jerusalem and ravage the Jews (Zech 14:2). Then Jesus and all the saints will come from heaven on white horses. Christ will destroy the armies of the Antichrist, and the beast and the false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19:11–21).

B) Christ will bind Satan. After the defeat of the Antichrist, Jesus will send His angel to seize the devil, “that ancient serpent,” and bind him. Satan will be sealed in a pit and prevented from deceiving the nations for a thousand years (cf. Rev 20:1–3).

C) Christ will gather and restore Israel. The most frequently mentioned promise in the Old Testament is God’s promise that He will one day gather and restore the nation of Israel (cf. Isa 27:12–13; Jer

³ The word “rapture” comes from the Latin Vulgate of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 in which the Greek word *harpagesometha* (“to seize, to catch up”) is translated as “*rapiémur*” (from *rápere* meaning “to grab, to carry off”). The Latin *rápere* eventually became the English *rapture*.

⁴ Sourced from Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 386–387. See also Hitchcock’s *The Complete Book of Bible Prophecy*, (Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 70–72.

⁵ This valley is also referred to by the hill at its western end: Mount Megiddo. In Hebrew, “Mount Megiddo” is *har meghiddo*, which is translated “Armageddon” by several English translations. Thus the Valley of Armageddon is actually the Valley of Jezreel.

30:10; 33:6–9; Ezek 36:24–38; 37:1–28). During the Tribulation period, the Jews will be scattered for the last time. When Christ returns, He will gather them and bring them into the wilderness for judgment. All rebels will be purged and only the faithful will be allowed to enter the land and Christ’s kingdom (Ezek 20:33–38).

D) Christ will judge the Gentiles. When Jesus returns, the nations will stand before Him and He will separate them into two groups—the sheep (believers) will stand on His right and the goats (unbelievers) on the left. The righteous will enter into eternal life, while the unrighteous will depart into eternal punishment. This is known as the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46).

E) Christ will resurrect those martyred during the Tribulation (Rev 20:4b). This resurrection is called the “first resurrection” (Rev 20:5).

(1) It is “first” in the sense that it comes before the resurrection of unbelievers at the end of the Millennium. It is also “first” in the sense that it is a resurrection of believers to eternal life (Rev 20:6), while the last resurrection is a resurrection of unbelievers to eternal death (Rev 20:13–14).

(2) The term “first resurrection” applies most directly to the martyrs of the Tribulation, but it also applies to earlier instances of a resurrection to life:⁶ (1) Jesus Christ is the “first fruits” of the first resurrection (1 Cor 15:20), and (2) the “dead in Christ” will be resurrected at the Rapture (1 Thess 4:16).

F) Christ will establish His earthly kingdom. Christ’s return will mark the beginning of His 1,000 year reign—the Millennium—on this present, fallen earth. He will establish and expand the borders of Israel (cf. Ezek 47:13–23) and build a new temple in Jerusalem (Ezek 40–46). Christ will rule the world with a rod of iron (Ps 2). It will be a time a great spiritual triumph in which ethnic Israel will fulfill her destiny, and the Gentiles will partake in tremendous blessings through Christ and His nation of priests.

5) *When will Jesus return?*

A) The disciples asked Jesus this same question after His resurrection. He told them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:7, ESV; cf. Matt 24:36). Thus the answer to this question is—no one knows when Jesus will return. Since it is not for us to know, we should not be caught up in trying to figure out the date of Christ’s return. Those who claim to know when Jesus will return are wrong—you should not listen to them or believe them.

⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 419.

6) *Why has Jesus waited so long to return?*

A) The apostle Peter said “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” (2 Pet 3:8–9, NIV).

B) Peter’s point is that we should not be worried or discouraged by the fact that Jesus has waited so long to return (more than 2,000 years so far). The Father knows the right time for His Son to return and is waiting patiently, not wanting anyone to perish. We should imitate His example and work as hard as we can to achieve His desire for “all people to be saved” (1 Tim 2:1–4).

7) *How then should we live?*

A) Charles Dyer once said, “God gave prophecy to change our hearts, not to fill our heads with knowledge. God never predicted future events just to satisfy our curiosity about the future. Every time God announces events that are future, He includes with His predictions practical applications to life. God’s pronouncements about the future carry with them specific advice for the ‘here and now.’”⁷

B) The apostle Peter tells us that our knowledge of the Second Coming should affect the way we live (2 Pet 3:10–18):

- We should live holy and godly lives (v. 11).
- We should wait patiently (v. 12)
- We should hasten Jesus’ coming by working to save the lost (v. 12).
- We should be diligent to live peaceful lives that are pure and blameless (v.14).
- We should understand that God’s patience is for our salvation (v. 15).
- We should be on guard so that we are not led astray by error (v.17).
- We should grow in grace and in the knowledge of God (v.18).

⁷ Hitchcock, *The End*, 12.