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Is Jesus Coming Back?

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Is Jesus Coming Back?

Imagine a moment when the skies split open, and a figure descends in radiant glory, visible to every eye on earth—friend and foe alike. The Bible foretells such a day when Jesus Christ will return to Jerusalem, not as a humble carpenter, but as the triumphant King, wielding unmatched power and divine authority (Revelation 1:7).

Following his resurrection, Jesus' disciples anticipated the immediate establishment of his kingdom. However, after commissioning them to spread the gospel globally, Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 1:9-11. As the disciples watched in awe, two angels appeared, declaring, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." This aligns with the prophecy in Zechariah 14:4, written 500 years earlier, which foretold the Messiah's return to the Mount of Olives to establish his kingdom.

Not only does the New Testament foretell Jesus physical return to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, but it also reveals that Jesus will return in the clouds for his Church. Some biblical scholars believe his return for believers and his return to Jerusalem occur at different times, while others think they occur simultaneously. Let's examine what the Bible actually says about Jesus' return to Jerusalem as well as his return for his Church.

Jesus' Return for His Church

Jesus' return for his Church, often referred to as the "rapture," is where believers will be caught up to meet him in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The New Testament outlines three key aspects of the rapture:

1. **Imminency:** Jesus instructed his disciples to, "Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42, NIV). The apostle Paul echoed that Jesus' return for his Church is imminent, urging believers to await "the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, NIV). This expectation of imminency encourages believers to live with anticipation and purity, as 1 John 3:2-3 states: "When Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."

2. **All Believers Caught Up:** Paul reassured the Thessalonian believers that both the living and the dead in Christ will participate in the rapture. He wrote, “The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, NIV).
3. **A Mystery Known Only to the Father:** Jesus emphasized that the timing of his return is unknown, stating, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36, NIV). Paul further described this event as a “mystery,” occurring “in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, NIV).

When Jesus was preparing his disciples for his departure to heaven, he comforted them by assuring them he would return to take them home to be with him. “I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:2-3, NIV).

The apostles and early church were comforted by their belief that Jesus’ return for them could happen at any time, not expecting any event to precede its occurrence. The apostle John concludes the Book of Revelation with Jesus’ promise, “Yes, I am coming soon,” to which John responds, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20, NIV). This anticipation of Jesus’ soon return has motivated many people to receive Jesus as both Savior and Lord.

Jesus’ Return to Jerusalem

As mentioned previously, the Bible also describes Jesus’ physical return to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, a dramatic event where “every eye will see him” (Revelation 1:7). This return will fulfill Old Testament prophecies and establish his earthly kingdom. Four key elements precede this event:

1. **Physical Return to Jerusalem:** Zechariah 14:4 specifies that the Messiah will one day return to the Mount of Olives, the same location from which Jesus ascended. God designated Jerusalem as the focal point of his redemptive plan. It was in Jerusalem (originally Moriah) that God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac on the alter. (Genesis 22). God was testing Abraham’s faith and would never have let Abraham kill his son. He was providing us with a picture,

foreshadowing the time when he would sacrifice his only Son on the cross for our sins.

2. **Signs and Wonders:** Jesus outlined specific signs preceding his return to Jerusalem, including increased earthquakes, famines, wars, epidemics, and persecution of believers (Matthew 24:3-14). He also noted that the gospel would be preached worldwide before the end (Matthew 24:14). Today, persecution of Christians is increasing at an alarming rate. And global communication technologies like the internet and media facilitate this unprecedented spread of the gospel, while natural disasters and conflicts align with Jesus' predictions.
3. **Jerusalem Surrounded by Enemies:** Prophecies in Ezekiel 36-38 and Zechariah 12-14 describe Jerusalem surrounded by hostile nations in the last days. The rebirth of Israel in 1948 and its control of Jerusalem since 1967 set the stage for these events.
4. **Rise of the Antichrist:** Paul and John describe a figure, the "man of lawlessness" or "antichrist," who will rise to power before Christ's return (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 13:1-10). This powerful figure will initiate a seven-year tribulation period with a deceptive peace treaty (Daniel 9:27), control the global economy, and oppose God. In the middle of the tribulation, the antichrist's blasphemous act in the Jewish temple will usher in God's judgment on a sinful world. At the tribulation's climax, Jesus will return to defeat him and establish His kingdom (Revelation 19:11-21).

God's Timetable

Although Scripture tells believers that Jesus could return for them at any moment, there are specific events on God's timetable that must take place prior to his return. In *Israel, God's Clock*, Dr. Jack MacArthur writes that the key to knowing where we are in God's timetable for Jesus' return is Israel's prophesied return to its homeland.

Let's take a brief look at what has happened in Israel, beginning with their rejection of Jesus as its Messiah.

When Jerusalem rejected Jesus as their Messiah, he sadly told the people, their "house will be left completely empty." In AD 70 Romans destroyed the city and those who survived fled to other lands. Jesus then said, "You will not see me again until that time when you will say, 'God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matthew 23:39, NCV).

After AD 70, Jerusalem remained under foreign control for nearly 1,900 years. During that period, most people never expected Israel would ever be reestablished as a nation. But God had promised their return: “I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land” (Ezekiel 36:24).

In fulfillment of prophecy, Jewish people flocked to their original homeland in waves, beginning in the early 20th century, and peaking in the 1930s due to persecution in Europe. Their desire to be restored as a nation was finally realized in 1948. Nineteen years later Jerusalem was conquered by the Jews, setting the stage for Christ’s return.

God’s timetable for Jesus’ return to Jerusalem also requires it to be surrounded by its enemies. The Israel-Hamas conflict, beginning October 7, 2023, and rising global antisemitism highlight the growing threats to Israel, aligning with biblical prophecies. Today, Israel is surrounded by several countries that are committed to Israel’s destruction.

So, now that the stage is set for Jesus’ return to Jerusalem, what does that mean for his coming for his Church? Although they are separate events, their timing is still related.

In 1894, British scholar Sir Robert Anderson wrote of Jesus’ imminent return, although Israel’s rebirth was still 54 years from fulfillment. In his classic survey of Daniel’s prophecy of the end times, *The Coming Prince*, Anderson writes,

Certain passages testify that Christ will return to earth...and others tell us that He will come, not to earth, but to the air above us, and call His people up to meet Him and be with Him....These difficulties admit of only one solution...namely, that the second advent of Christ is not a single event, but includes several distinct manifestations. At first, He will call up to Himself the righteous dead, together with His own people then living upon earth. Before the return of Christ to earth, many a page of prophecy has yet to be fulfilled...but not a line of Scripture bars the realization of this the Church’s special hope of His coming to take His people to Himself.¹

Since Jesus’ return for believers and his return to Jerusalem are linked together in the “second advent,” Israel’s rebirth should cause us to “look up for your redemption is near” (Luke 21:28).

Why the Delay?

In *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Bertrand Russell questioned Jesus' delay, accusing Him of breaking his promise. Peter anticipated such criticism, noting that scoffers would say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?"² (2 Peter 3:4, NIV). Peter explained, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NIV).

Preparing for Jesus' Return

C.S. Lewis summarized how believers can prepare for Christ's return with three key principles:³

1. Jesus will certainly return.
2. The timing is unknown.
3. Therefore, we must always be ready.

To Prepare:

- **Ensure a Personal Relationship with Jesus:** Accept his forgiveness and salvation.
- **Live to Please Him:** Paul wrote, "We make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (2 Corinthians 5:9, NIV). Believers should live in obedience to Christ, sharing the gospel as commanded in Matthew 28:19-20.

The Adventure of Living with Jesus is a great study for new believers and those who want to renew their commitment to Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

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Endnotes