

Is Jesus Coming Back?

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus took his disciples to the Mount of Olives, where he was lifted up into the clouds out of their sight. While they were gazing up in bewilderment, two men in white apparel (angels) told them,

Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return![1]

These angels weren't saying anything new. They were merely confirming Jesus' clear promise that he would return someday in power, glory and judgment.[2]

Broken Promise?

It has been nearly 2,000 years since Jesus left earth, and many wonder why he has taken so long to return. In his book, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, atheist Bertrand Russell accused Jesus of breaking his promise to return.[3]

Russell argues that Jesus couldn't have been "all wise" if he broke such an important promise. He certainly couldn't have been God as he claimed so frequently (See <http://y-jesus.com/more/jcg-jesus-claim-god>). So is it possible that Russell is right about Jesus breaking his promise?

The Apostle Peter predicted scoffers like Russell would point to Jesus' delay as a broken promise. He writes,

First, I want to remind you that in the last days there will be scoffers who will laugh at the truth and do every evil thing they desire. This will be their argument: 'Jesus promised to come back, did he? Then where is he? Why, as far back as anyone can remember, everything has remained exactly the same since the world was first created!'[4]

Perhaps Russell and other scoffers should have looked closer at Peter's words, as well as what Jesus said about the timing of his return, and the events that would precede it. Jesus did say that, although no man would know the exact timing of his return, certain clues would tell us that it is drawing near.[5]

Additionally, the Old Testament prophets and Jesus' apostles also provide insight about what the world scene will look like just prior to the return of Jesus Christ. Let's look briefly at a few of these clues to the general timing of Jesus' return:[6]

What are the Signs of Jesus' Return?

- Major earthquakes
- Worldwide famine
- Wars
- Worldwide epidemics
- Persecution of believers
- Gospel proclaimed worldwide

Earthquakes, famines, epidemics, and wars have occurred throughout human history, but Jesus said there would be a noticeable increase of such events prior to his return.[7] Persecution of believers began with the apostles and is on the increase today. More Christians are being persecuted for their faith now than at any time in history. Jesus tells us that such persecution will continue until his return, as will the worldwide proclamation of the gospel.

According to Jesus, when all of these events capture the world scene, we are to "look up," for his return will be

soon.[8] Although Bible scholars don't agree on all the details regarding Jesus' return, many believe that the time Jesus spoke of is rapidly approaching. Paul told believers to be ready and "watch for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." [9]

So we need to know if Jesus' promise to return is still true. And if so, why is he delaying so long to fulfill his promise?

Peter explained the reason for Jesus' delay.

But you should never lose sight of this fact, dear friends that time is not the same with the Lord as it is with us—to him a day may be a thousand years, and a thousand years only a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent."[10]

Peter was writing to believers who were experiencing trials and persecution. They wanted Jesus to come sooner rather than later. However, Peter tells them that God's first priority is to spread the gospel of Christ throughout the world, reaching as many people as possible. Jesus had already told his disciples that the gospel would be preached to all nations before he came.[11]

Has Jesus Kept other Promises?

How do we answer scoffers such as Bertrand Russell who accused Jesus of breaking his promise to return?

First, we might ask how Jesus knew 2,000 years ago that the gospel would indeed be preached throughout the world. How could he have known that, unless he knew the future?

Second, we need to look at other promises Jesus made to see if they were kept. Let's look at three other major things Jesus promised:

1. He is the fulfillment of messianic prophecies.[12]
2. Jerusalem would be destroyed.[13]
3. He would die and rise again three days later.[14]

Did Jesus Fulfill Ancient Prophecies?

Let's look at whether or not Jesus fulfilled Old Testament messianic prophecies.

The Bible is the only holy book that contains a large body of specific prophecies relating to nations, Israel and the coming Messiah.[15] Nearly 300 references were made in the Old Testament about the coming Messiah. They told of his lineage, his birthplace, his betrayal, his death, and his resurrection. These references were written 500 to 1,000 years before Jesus was born, and he fulfilled every one.

Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls proves the prophecies were written at least 100 years before Christ, making it impossible for them to have been staged. The odds that one person could fulfill each of these prophecies without error are statistically impossible.[16] Jesus' fulfillment of so many specific prophecies is compelling evidence that he truly was the promised Messiah (see "Was Jesus the Messiah?")

Was Jesus Right about Jerusalem?

Second, let's examine Jesus' prophecy of Jerusalem's impending destruction, a prediction that seemed impossible at the time, and shocked those who heard it.[17] Jesus warned the Jews that their rejection of him would result in a horrible ending for Jerusalem and for the destruction of its magnificent Temple.

Tragically, Jesus' words came true. One million Jews were killed forty years later as Titus and the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem. The Jewish historian, Josephus, recorded these unusual signs during Jerusalem's fall in 70 A.D.[18]

1. "A meteor, resembling a sword, hung over Jerusalem one whole year."
2. "A light equal to the brightness of the day, continued for half an hour."
3. "Chariots and armed men were seen in the air"

Josephus writes of other unusual things that occurred during the Roman siege as well. What did these signs mean? Some scholars believe Jesus' return in the clouds was fulfilled figuratively by these signs in 70 A.D.[19] However, the actual fulfillment of Jesus' literal return to Jerusalem has not yet occurred.

Was Jesus Right about His Resurrection?

The third significant prediction Jesus made was that he would rise from the dead after being crucified. Of that claim, Bible scholar Wilbur Smith argues:

When he said that He himself would rise again from the dead, the third day after He was crucified, He said something that only a fool would dare say, if He expected longer the devotion of any disciples—unless He was sure He was going to rise. No founder of any world religion known to men ever dared say a thing like that.[20]

Jesus' prediction put everything else he said in jeopardy. If he didn't rise from the dead as promised, why would anyone continue believing him? Yet his followers enthusiastically did. In a New York Times article, Peter Steinfels cites the startling events that occurred three days after Jesus' death:

Shortly after Jesus was executed, his followers were suddenly galvanized from a baffled and cowering group into people whose message about a living Jesus and a coming kingdom, preached at the risk of their lives, eventually changed an empire. Something happened. ... But exactly what?[21]

So, what did happen that turned the first century world on its heels? Is there evidence that Jesus did rise from the dead? Skeptic Frank Morrison originally began writing a book to disprove the resurrection. After examining the evidence, he reversed himself and wrote a different book on why he believed it to be true.

Another skeptic, Dr. Simon Greenleaf, founder of Harvard Law School, scoffed at Jesus' resurrection to some law students. When challenged to investigate, Greenleaf began applying his famous rules of evidence to the case. After a detailed evaluation of the evidence, he became convinced that the resurrection really happened, primarily because of the radical change in the disciples (see "Did Jesus rise from the dead?")

So, if Jesus fulfilled numerous messianic prophecies written hundreds of years before his birth, correctly predicted the fall of Jerusalem, and kept his incredible promise to rise from the dead as the evidence suggests, would any reasonable person doubt his promise to return?

Where Will Jesus Return?

The Bible speaks of the Lord returning to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.[22] Some may ask, "Why not in New York, London, Los Angeles or Tokyo?" But God chose Jerusalem as the place of his return. Although Jerusalem is tiny among such cities, it is of the utmost importance to God. A brief history explains why.

Jerusalem was the place (originally called Moriah) where God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. But God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, instead providing a ram for him to offer. In fact, God had never intended Isaac to be sacrificed; he was testing Abraham's faith, and giving us a symbolic picture of his only Son being sacrificed 2,000 years later in Jerusalem, near that very spot.

Solomon built the first Jewish Temple over the same spot where Abraham sacrificed the ram in place of Isaac. It was there that the Holy of Holies was located, the sacred room where God said his presence dwelt.[23]

Five hundred years before Christ, it was prophesied that the Jews would be the occupants of Jerusalem when the Messiah arrives in the end times.[24] However, when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., a million of its inhabitants were killed, and the rest fled for their lives. Jerusalem's long history as the central place of Jewish worship ceased to exist. Jews could only dream of its future restoration.

However, the Jews' dreams that Jerusalem would one day be restored were based on God's promise given through his prophet Ezekiel nearly 600 years before Christ. This prophecy speaks of the dispersion of the Jews to other nations due to their disobedience. It then tells that in the last days, God will send them back to their land from other nations. God said through his prophet: "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land." [25]

For nearly 1900 years following its destruction by Roman armies, there was no nation of Israel, and Jerusalem was a "no-man's land" under foreign occupation. Then, in the latter part of the 19th century, Jews began populating Palestine. After the Holocaust imposed by Hitler's Nazis, Jews immigrated en masse to Israel.

On May 14, 1948, the Jews' 2,000-year-old dream of the rebirth of Israel became a reality, as a United Nations charter granted them partial control of Jerusalem. However, within hours, five Arab armies along its borders vowed to destroy it. Tensions between Israel and its neighbors became explosive.

In 1967, Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian armies surrounded Israel. Newspaper headlines read, "Egypt Vows to Destroy Israel." [26] Israel's army seemed to be hopelessly outnumbered. But a surprise attack by Israel devastated its enemies in just six days. Many spoke of the Jews' overwhelming victory as a miracle. After Israel's lightning victory in the 1967 war, Jerusalem finally belonged to Israel, and the peace they had hoped for seemed within reach. Yet, the prophecy that Jerusalem would become a "burdensome stone" to the world has come true. [27]

Israel's miraculous rebirth has set the stage for the coming of the Messiah which requires the Jews to dwell in Jerusalem. Nearly six million Jews now live in the land God promised to Abraham. In one century, Israel has exploded from virtual non-existence into a nation that dominates the world's headlines.

How Will Jesus Return?

The Bible speaks of the Lord returning visibly with great power and glory.

Five hundred years prior to Christ, the prophet Zechariah wrote of the Lord coming to Jerusalem during a time of intense war. Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies from "all nations." The battle will be bloody and fierce, and the armies of Israel will be overwhelmed by its enemies. Then, something dramatic will change everything.

Suddenly, when all hope seems gone, the Jews will gaze up in the sky and see their mighty Lord himself coming in the clouds. We are told that "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him." [28] The Lord speaks through the prophet, telling us how he will be recognized when he returns:

They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died. [29]

It is important to understand that this prophecy of the Messiah's return to Jerusalem was written *five hundred years before Jesus was born*. No other person in history has been pierced, died and returned to life. It will be an incredible, emotionally moving experience for all who see him.

In an instant, the Jews defending their city will realize that the Lord saving them is the very Jesus whom their ancestors had rejected. How will they recognize him? The same way the disciples recognized Jesus after his resurrection: by the nail prints in his hands. It is then that they will weep bitterly, and “mourn for him as for an only son.” It is then that they will realize his great love for them.

When Jesus returns, those who have already died “in Christ” will be the first to meet him in the air. Then those from every nation who are still alive and trust him as their Lord and Savior will meet him in the air.[30] Bible scholars disagree on the timing of these amazing events; however, as Paul wrote, we should be watching and waiting for the “blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”[31]

Jesus’ promise to return will be fulfilled just as literally as were prophecies of his first coming. It will be in God’s time when all prophesied world events are finally in place. His return will be a time of joy and reward for believers, but a time of horrible judgment for unbelievers.[32]

C. S. Lewis cited three propositions to remember about Jesus’ return:[33]

1. He will certainly return
2. We cannot possibly find out when
3. Therefore we must always be ready for him

We have already established that Jesus promises to return, and that his words are believable. We have also seen that Jesus himself said that we cannot know exactly when he will return. But how do we prepare for his return?

How to Prepare For Jesus’ Return

Jesus admonished his followers to prepare for his return as if it was the most important thing in their lives.[34] He used the illustration of a wise servant preparing things for his master’s return. In another instance he spoke of us anticipating his return as (under Jewish custom) a bride should be ready for the arrival of her bridegroom.[35]

When Jesus returns for his own, he will return personally to those who already have a relationship with him. Jesus said,

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ [36]

In this passage, Jesus tells us that our good deeds for God are worthless unless we have a relationship with him. The only thing that will count when we die or see him return is knowing him.[37] So, how do we get to know him?

Since Jesus is a person, we simply talk to him, thanking him for dying for us and telling him we want him to be our Lord. According to Jesus, those who personally put their faith in him and receive him into their lives are given the right to become children of God.[38]

When Jesus returns in power, he will separate those who belong to him from those who have left him out of their lives. His return will be followed by a judgment at which time everyone’s thoughts and deeds will be open before him.[39]

In order to prepare for Jesus’ return the most important thing you can do is to understand what Jesus did for you on the cross, and choose to put your faith in him. To make certain you are ready to meet him when he returns, [click here to read the article “Why Jesus?”](#)

If you already know Christ, there will be no future judgment for your sins, since Jesus paid for all of them on the cross. As his child, you have been given eternal life with him. Jesus also tells us that what we do for Christ in this

life counts. He says,

My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.^[40]
He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon!"^[41]

The Apostle John then responds enthusiastically, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!"^[42] May each of us have that same expectant attitude and be ready for his return!

Endnotes – Is Jesus Coming Back?

1. Acts 1:10, 11.
2. Matthew 24:27-31.
3. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Touchstone, 1957), 16.
4. 2 Peter 3:4, NLT.
5. Matthew 25:13.
6. Matthew 24:3-14.
7. Matthew 24:3-51.
8. Luke 21:28.
9. Titus 2:13.
10. 2 Peter 3:8-9.
11. Matthew 24:14.
12. Matthew 16:13-17; Luke 4:16-21; 7:19-23.
13. Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44; 21:20-24.
14. Matthew 12:40; 17:22-23.
15. Quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*(Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 12.
16. Peter Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958.), 97-110.
17. Matthew 24:1-14; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-38.
18. Quoted in <http://kloposmasm.wordpress.com/>.
19. <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/return-christ/>.
20. Quoted in McDowell, 209.
21. Peter Steinfelds, "Jesus Died—And Then What Happened?" *New York Times*, April 3, 1988.
22. Zechariah 14:4.
23. Leviticus 16:2, 29-30.
24. Zechariah 14:1-4.
25. Ezekiel 36:24, NLT.
26. *Los Angeles Times*, front page, May 27, 1967.
27. Zechariah 12:3.
28. Revelation 1:7.
29. Zechariah 12:10.
30. 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.
31. Titus 2:13.
32. Revelation 21:3-15.
33. C. S. Lewis, "Predictions of the Second Coming," quoted in: <http://www.atkinsmarketingsolutions.com/wp/2011/05/21/rapture-marketing-c-s-lewis-end-of-the-world-predictions/>
34. Luke 12:35-40.
35. Matthew 25:1-13.
36. Matthew 7:21-23, NASB.

37. Matthew 7:22-23, NASB.

38. John 1:12.

39. Revelation 20:11-15.

40. Revelation 22:12, NIV.

41. Revelation 22:20.

42. Ibid.