

1. Study Isaiah 11, using the basic principles of prophetic interpretation. To whom and to what experiences do verses 1-9 refer? How would the Jews have looked for this to be fulfilled in harmony with other promises? To what did verses 10-16 refer in their primary application? What second application is made by a later inspired writer? See *Prophets and Kings*, pages 375:1 to 376:2. Of what importance is this account to us today?

2. Many Christians believe that the Bible predictions of earthly glory for ancient Israel are yet to be fulfilled for the Jews as a nation. Show in what ways this is an erroneous interpretation of prophecy. *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, volume 4, pages 25-36, will give you much material to work with.

## The End Is Near

Ever since the day Jesus ascended to heaven from Mount Olivet His disciples have longed for His promised return. John 14:3; Acts 1:9-12. For nineteen centuries the second advent has been their "blessed hope." Titus 2:13. But Scripture makes plain that this long anticipation does not eliminate an element of surprise in the Saviour's return. °What do the following verses reveal about the unexpectedness of the second advent?

*Matthew 24:36, 42	Acts 1:6, 7	2 Peter 3:10
Luke 21:34-36	*1 Thessalonians 5:2-6	*Revelation 16:15

Despite the fact that God has not stated the exact time for Christ's return, He has made provision so that no one need be taken by surprise. See:

*Matthew 24:33	*Luke 21:28	1 Thessalonians 5:4
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°What reasons can you see for God to predict certain events that indicate the second advent is near without specifying the time? Seventh-day Adventists are confident that the Biblical signs are nearly all fulfilled and that the remainder will be fulfilled soon.

Christ's own description of the signs preceding His return forms the nucleus for any thorough study of the signs. His words are recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

### I. Christ's Own Prediction

When Jesus left the temple court for the last time, He went to the Mount of Olives with a group of His disciples. As they looked over Jerusalem, the disciples called Jesus' attention to the temple buildings. They were shocked by His comment that the day was coming when not one stone of the temple would be left upon another. Matthew 24:1, 2. As they sat on the grassy slope, Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Mark 13:3) questioned the Saviour: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Matthew 24:3.

Jesus answered their two questions in a blended account of the events

to precede Jerusalem's destruction and those preceding His second advent. His description in Matthew 24:1-42 is paralleled by Mark and Luke. Matthew 24 will be used here as the basic account.

Although a number of Christ's predictions referred primarily to events preceding and related to the fall of Jerusalem, some of these have a second application in the events preceding the second advent. The whole prophecy has important implications for the church in the last days. ° See again the principles of interpretation suggested in chapter 49, and apply them to Matthew 24.

The predictions of Matthew 24:4-20 had their primary application to events between Jesus' departure from earth and the destruction of Jerusalem. ° Study carefully the several ideas expressed there.<sup>1</sup>

*Matthew 24:3.* Distinguish between "these things" and "the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world." Matthew 24:3.

*Matthew 24:4-13.* What could the disciples anticipate as far as national conditions, suffering, and persecution were concerned? What spiritual deceptions would be attempted? What would be the effect on many?

*Matthew 24:14.* This verse spoke primarily of the spread of the gospel before Jerusalem would be destroyed—"the end" of the Jewish nation. Paul's testimony later indicated that the gospel had been scattered among all peoples. See Colossians 1:5, 6, 23; Romans 1:8; see also spirit of prophecy comments.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *The Desire of Ages*, pages 628:1 to 630:4.

<sup>2</sup> "In the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction Christ said, 'Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.' This prophecy will again be fulfilled. The abounding iniquity of that day finds its counterpart in this generation. So with the prediction in regard to the preaching of the gospel. Before the fall of Jerusalem, Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, declared that the gospel was preached to 'every creature which is under heaven.' Colossians 1:23. So now, before the coming of the Son of man, the everlasting gospel is to be preached 'to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.'"—*The Desire of Ages*, page 633:3.

"Christ ascended to heaven and sent His Holy Spirit to give power to the work of His disciples. Thousands were converted in a day. In a single generation the gospel was carried to every nation under heaven. But little by little a change came. The church lost her first love. She became selfish and ease-loving. The spirit of worldliness was cherished. The enemy cast his spell upon those to whom God had given light for a world in darkness, light which should have shone forth in good works. The world was robbed of the blessings that God desired men to receive."—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 26:3.

*Matthew 24:15-20.* These predictions were fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem.

Verses 21-29 have their fulfillment in events leading to the second advent.

*Matthew 24:21, 22.* Beginning with verse 21, Christ turned the attention of His disciples to events between the destruction of Jerusalem and His second advent. Looking back, it is easy for a person to identify the long period of persecution extending through the Dark Ages through the Reformation to about the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

*Matthew 24:23-28.* "Then"—after the persecution of verses 21, 22. The warning in verses 4, 5 referred to signs of Jerusalem's destruction. This second warning applies specifically to the last days—preceding the second advent.<sup>4</sup>

*Matthew 24:29.* Note the time of the events of this verse. Compare Mark 13:24. The tribulation is the 1260 years of persecution ending in 1798. The darkening of the sun took place on May 19, 1780—within the predicted time, and after the worst persecution had ceased. See "Supplementary Material."<sup>5</sup>

The prediction that "the stars shall fall from heaven" was fulfilled on November 13, 1833. See "Supplementary Material."

*Luke 21:24, 25.* See the additional signs mentioned in Luke's account. See also Luke 18:8.

<sup>3</sup> "From the destruction of Jerusalem, Christ passed on rapidly to the greater event, the last link in the chain of this earth's history,—the coming of the Son of God in majesty and glory. Between these two events, there lay open to Christ's view long centuries of darkness, centuries for His church marked with blood and tears and agony. Upon these scenes His disciples could not then endure to look, and Jesus passed them by with a brief mention. . . . For more than a thousand years such persecution as the world had never before known was to come upon Christ's followers. Millions upon millions of His faithful witnesses were to be slain. Had not God's hand been stretched out to preserve His people, all would have perished. 'But for the elect's sake,' He said, 'those days shall be shortened.'"—*The Desire of Ages*, pages 630:5 to 631:0.

<sup>4</sup> "Now, in unmistakable language, our Lord speaks of His second coming, and He gives warning of dangers to precede His advent to the world. . . . As one of the signs of Jerusalem's destruction, Christ had said, 'Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.' False prophets did rise, deceiving the people, and leading great numbers into the desert. . . . But this prophecy was spoken also for the last days. This sign is given as a sign of the second advent. Even now false christs and false prophets are showing signs and wonders to seduce His disciples."—*The Desire of Ages*, page 631:1.

See *The Great Controversy*, pages 304-316 (not quoted).

<sup>5</sup> See *The Great Controversy*, pages 305-308, 333, 334 (not quoted).

*Matthew 24:30-35.* All the signs are indications that the second advent is approaching.

*Matthew 24:36-39.* No man knows the exact time of Christ's return. Men will continue to go about their everyday activities until the advent catches them by surprise.

## II. Other Predictions

Besides the predictions Christ gave, there are others that point to His return. Some overlap or expand our Lord's prophecies, and others add to the signs He presented. Below is a list of some in all of these classes. °Organize the signs mentioned by Christ in the Matthew, Mark, and Luke passages, and those suggested below, under the following general headings: (1) Signs in the heavens; (2) Signs in the natural world; (3) Signs among the nations; (4) Signs in everyday life. °Some conditions among men have existed at other times but are intensified in the last days. What are they?

For example, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11 was partly fulfilled in Paul's time, further fulfilled during the Dark Ages, but it reaches the climax of fulfillment just prior to Christ's return. °Look for other prophecies of this type as you study the predictions in the following verses. What is the substance of each?

*Daniel 2:40-45	*2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13	*Revelation 6:12, 13
1 Thessalonians 5:1-5	2 Timothy 4:1-4	*Revelation 11:18
*2 Thessalonians 2: 1-11	James 5:1-8	*Revelation 14:6-20
	*2 Peter 3:3-6	Revelation 16

°You should be able to find at least two or three recent news items that confirm the fulfillment of these prophecies. Be prepared to discuss the most recent as well as the most outstanding fulfillments.

Often men declare that believers have looked for Christ's advent so long that there is no point in continuing the watch. Sometimes doubters suggest that since Seventh-day Adventists have been preaching Christ's return for more than a century they should give up and admit they are mistaken. But what has the passage of time done to our message that Christ will return soon? Has it weakened or strengthened our position and our confidence? In his *Reasons for Our Faith*, F. D. Nichol lists a number of predictions we have preached which have been completely fulfilled as time has passed, and these confirmations strengthen our confidence. Here is his list without his comments on each item. However, the whole chapter is worthy of careful reading. °Note how the years have confirmed the accuracy of the predictions.

"1. We forecast the revival of the papacy, declaring that all the world would wonder after the beast that had the deadly wound and did live."

"2. We forecast increasing religious apostasy in Christendom."

"3. We forecast troubles in the realm of capital and labor."

"4. We forecast the decline of freedom."

"5. We forecast the coming into prominence, if not dominance, of the United States, in world affairs."

"6. We forecast great wars, climaxing in a final world conflict, while at the same time we declared that there would be much talk of peace and safety."

"7. We forecast that the time would come when men's hearts would fail them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth."

"8. We forecast a final confederation of some kind on the part of the nations, with the papacy very central to the confederacy."

The author then points out how changing conditions have led men to the very conditions predicted, and points out changed attitudes toward the substance of the prophecies.

"1. No one now laughs at our most doleful predictions."

"2. To laugh at Adventist declarations of doom would be to laugh at statesmen, scientists, educators, and other eminent men, who actually outdo us in painting a dark picture of the future."

"3. Eminent men, in painting their dark picture of the future, often use language almost identical with that which Adventists have used in painting the final scene of earth's history."

"4. Certain statements of Holy Writ take on new force and possible meaning . . . Revelation 11:18. . . . Revelation 16:19. . . . 2 Peter 3:12."

"5. The fact that the whole world is shattered and bleeding and bankrupt, with mutual suicide as the logical end of all future war planning and with no moral power sufficient to stem the tide, means that we have a new and most powerful argument in behalf of our doctrine of Christ's coming."

"6. A century ago, when the preaching of the literal soon coming of Christ began to be proclaimed, our opponents scoffed. . . . They were confident that moral regeneration, not physical conflagration, was soon to transform this earth. . . . Today we can say without reservation that the tribunal of time has resolved the controversy and has passed a vigorous judgment."

"7. One question only remains to be answered. How did we succeed in forecasting so accurately these times? . . . Where did we gain our prophetic insight that enabled us to foretell so accurately what is now

current history? The answer is, From the Bible.”—F. D. Nichol, *Reasons for Our Faith*, pages 134-144.

Not weakness, but strength, has been added to our preaching with the passing of time. Today Seventh-day Adventists are in the strongest position ever on the doctrine of the soon-coming second advent. Our problems are not with the prophecies but with our own preparation to meet the returning Saviour.

## TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Which signs of the second advent can be most clearly seen as in process of fulfillment today?
2. What signs remain to be fulfilled?
3. What instruction other than that which reminds us Christ is coming soon do you find in these prophecies? Have they value other than as milestones?
4. How are God's purposes better accomplished by giving signs of Christ's return rather than specifying the exact time?
5. What does the nearness of the end mean to you and your college group? How much does it influence your life and your plans? What things are different in your life from the lives of the young people who do not have this hope?

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The dark day of May 19, 1780, is so well remembered that it has been a standard listing in Webster's unabridged dictionary. The 1954 printing lists this definition under "dark day": "Any day characterized by great darkness, whether due to cloudiness, smoke, volcanic ashes, or the like; esp., May 19, 1780, when an unexplained darkness extended over all New England (possibly due to forest fires)." May 19, 1780, has gone down in history as the dark day. Earlier dictionaries gave much more complete descriptions of the circumstances.

An eyewitness described the occasion thus: "The *time* of this extraordinary darkness was May 19, 1780. It came on between the hours of ten and eleven a.m., and continued until the middle of the next night, but with different appearance at different places.

"As to the *manner* of its approach, it seemed to appear first of all in the southwest. The wind came from that quarter, and the darkness appeared to come on with the clouds that came in that direction.

"The *degree* to which the darkness arose was different in different places. In most parts of the country it was so great that people were unable to read common print, determine the time of day by their clocks or watches, dine, or manage their domestic business, without the light of candles. In some places the darkness was so great that persons could not see to read common print in

the open air, for several hours together: but I believe this was not generally the case.

"The *extent* of this darkness was very remarkable. Our intelligence in this respect is not so particular as I could wish; but from the accounts that have been received, it seems to have extended all over the New England States. It was observed as far east as Falmouth [Portland, Maine]. To the westward we hear of its reaching to the furthest parts of Connecticut, and Albany. To the southward it was observed all along the seacoasts, and to the north as far as our settlements extend. It is probable it extended much beyond these limits in some directions. . . .

"With regard to its *duration*, it continued in this place at least fourteen hours; but it is probable this was not exactly the same in different parts of the country.

"The *appearance* and *effects* were such as tended to make the prospect extremely dull and gloomy. Candles were lighted up in the houses; the birds, having sung their evening songs, disappeared, and became silent; the fowls retired to roost; the cocks were crowing all around, as at break of day; objects could not be distinguished but at a very little distance; and everything bore the appearance and gloom of night."—Samuel Williams, A.M., Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Philosophy in the University of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in *Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, to the end of the year 1783, vol. 1, pp. 234, 235.

A historian of astronomy described the falling stars: "On the night of November 12-13, 1833, a tempest of falling stars broke over the earth. North America bore the brunt of its pelting. From the Gulf of Mexico to Halifax, until daylight with some difficulty put an end to the display, the sky was scored in every direction with shining tracks and illuminated with majestic fireballs."—Agnes M. Clerke, *History of Astronomy in the Nineteenth Century*, page 328, London, 1902.

An eyewitness compared the incident with the Bible prediction:

"And how did they fall? Neither myself nor one of the family heard any report; and were I to hunt through nature for a simile, I could not find one so apt to illustrate the appearance of the heavens as that which St. John uses in the prophecy, before quoted. 'It rained fire!' says one. Another, 'It was like a shower of fire.' Another, 'It was like the large flakes of falling snow before a coming storm, or large drops of rain before a shower.'

"I admit the fitness of these for common accuracy; but they come far short of the accuracy of the figure used by the prophet. 'The stars of heaven fell unto the earth;' they were not sheets, or flakes, or drops of fire; but they were what the world understands by the name of 'falling stars;' and one speaking to his fellow in the midst of the scene would say, 'See how the stars fall;' and he who heard, would not pause to correct the astronomy of the speaker, any more than he would reply, 'The sun does not move,' to one who should tell him, 'The sun is rising.'

"The stars fell 'even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.' Here is the exactness of the prophet. The falling stars did not come as if from *several* trees shaken, but from *one*. Those which appeared in the east fell toward the east; those which appeared in the north fell toward the north; those which appeared in the west fell toward the west;

and those which appeared in the south (for I went out of my residence into the park) fell toward the south; and they fell, not as the *ripe* fruit falls; far from it; but they *flew*, they *were cast*, like the unripe fig, which at first refuses to leave the branch; and when it does break its hold, flies swiftly, straight off, descending; and in the multitude falling, some cross the track of others, as they are thrown with more or less force.

“Such was the appearance of the above phenomenon to the inmates of my house. I walked into the park with two gentlemen of Pearl Street, feeling and confessing that this scene had never been figured to our minds by any book or mortal, save only by the prophet.”—A correspondent in the *New York Journal of Commerce*, [later identified as Henry Dana Ward] vol. VIII, No. 534, Saturday Morning, Nov. 16, 1833.

## The Three Angels' Messages

Of the angels seen by John the revelator, none bore more solemn or momentous messages than the three pictured in Revelation 14:6-12. They are featured as a group because their messages form a unit. Their words announced that the hour of God's judgment has come, that Babylon has fallen, and that dreadful punishment would be meted out to those who worship the beast or his image. To know the time of application and the significance of these messages—or of this threefold message—is essential in understanding the closing events of this earth.<sup>1</sup>

### I. The Setting

Chronologically the scenes of Revelation 14:6-20 precede Revelation 14:1-5. Verses 1-5 portray the 144,000 on Mount Zion—redeemed from the earth and standing without fault before God's throne. The rest of the chapter shows events preceding and leading up to this appearance on Mount Zion—the preaching of the gospel, the fall of Babylon, the punishment of the wicked, the second advent of Christ, and another mention of punishment.

The three angels' messages and the message of Revelation 18:1-5 constitute God's final appeal to the world just before Christ's second advent. Completion of the great commission to preach the gospel to all nations precedes the Saviour's return, the reward for the righteous, and the punishment for the wicked.<sup>2</sup> See:

<sup>1</sup> “The third angel's message, embracing the messages of the first and second angels, is the message for this time.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 197:2.

“The three angels' messages are to be combined, giving their threefold light to the world.”—Ellen G. White, quoted in *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 985 (Manuscript 52, 1900).

<sup>2</sup> “The three angels of Revelation 14 are represented as flying in the midst of heaven, symbolizing the work of those who proclaim the first, second, and third angels' messages. All are linked together.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 17:4.

See *Selected Messages*, b. 2, p. 387:1.

*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 18:1.

“Christ is coming the second time, with power unto salvation. To prepare