***When Jesus Returns, Pt. 2: About Times and Dates***

**The Gospel Difference, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 May 28, 2023**

***Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you,
for you know very well that the day do the Lord will come like a thief in the night . . . .
But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day
should surprise you like a thief.***

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-4**

**Times and dates**

*Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

*4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

1 Thessalonians 5

1. Jesus’ *Parousia* will be an amazement to those walking in darkness

2. Jesus’ *Parousia* will be the moment believers fully experience God’s redemption

**Why the Thessalonians already knew this**

*6 So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

*7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.
 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Acts 1:6-8 (see Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:36)

1. They had the prophetic history: Isaiah 13; Joel 2; Amos 5; Zephaniah 1,14; Malachi 4:5

2. They took seriously Jesus’ final words



**Light and Darkness**

 *4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.*

1 Thessalonians 5

 *5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

1 John 1

*35 Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.
36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light . . . .*

*44 Then Jesus cried out, “When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. 45 When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. 46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.*

John 12

1. Those who sleep live as though there will be no judgment so they live in moral laxity

2. Those who are alert, watchful, are conscious of the coming judgment and living sanctified

**What we can know about the when**

 *3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”*

*4 Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.*

*9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come . . . .*

*30 “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”*

Matthew 24 (we’ll cover this passage during our Wednesday study)

1. This “Tribualtion” begins with trouble and ends with The Trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4

2. God limits this “turning away” for the sake of the elect (see 24:20-25)

 *Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers,
2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. . . .*

*6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,
10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.*

2 Thessalonians 2:6

1. We won’t need a tweet – this archetypal “rebellion” will be GATDOTL evident

2. This “man of lawlessness” is the “abomination” of Daniel (see Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9:27, 11:31)

3. The “one” of 2:7 is the Holy Spirit (see Revelation 20:6ff.)

**Living in the shadow of tribulation (or even Tribulation)**

1. Facing the “man of lawlessness” is a spiritual exercise

 *10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

Ephesians 6

2. Take advantage of evil restrained

*5 Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.*

2 Thessalonians 2

*And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.*

Revelation 20

3. Put on faith, love and hope

*But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 (doesn’t this feel like Ephesians 5-6?)

**Resources for reading 1 Thessalonians**

The poster for 1 Thessalonians can be found at [*bibleproject.com*](file:///I%3A%5CLent%202023%5Cbibleproject.com)

Doug’s favorite 1 Thessalonians commentaries include
Charles Wannamaker’s NIGTC volume (Eerdmans, 1990)
Hendricksen’s *Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1955)
Robert Thomas’ volume in *Expositors’ Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981)

John MacArthur has a very interesting sermon, “The Ideal Church” at [*https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1317A*](https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1317A)

Spurgeon’s sermon on 5:6 is at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1022.pdf> and his “Forever with the Lord” sermon on this text is at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1374.pdf>

John Newton’s “Great Advent” sermon is at [*https://www.monergism.com/great-advent*](https://www.monergism.com/great-advent)

Thomas Schreiner has a wonderful essay on the optimism in 1 Thessalonians at [*http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/3.3\_editorial.pdf*](http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/3.3_editorial.pdf)

Ligonier has a good summary of the rapture question at [*https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-is-the-rapture*](https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-is-the-rapture)

Kim Riddlebarger has some wonderful resources on the rapture question at [*https://www.kimriddlebarger.com/the-riddleblog/the-rapture?rq=the-rapture*](https://www.kimriddlebarger.com/the-riddleblog/the-rapture?rq=the-rapture)

For an short overall look at the New Testament teaching on the Second Coming, I like this essay from Alan Bandy at TGC: [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-return-of-christ/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-return-of-christ/)

For a more Reformed theology of the Second Coming, I recommend Berkhof’s summary at Theologue:
[*https://theologue.wordpress.com/?s=berkhof+second+coming*](https://theologue.wordpress.com/?s=berkhof+second+coming)

Scott Clark has an interesting blog (which includes Norman’s “I Wish We’d All Been Ready”) at [*https://heidelblog.net/2014/10/two-points-on-left-behind-and-the-secret-rapture-1/*](https://heidelblog.net/2014/10/two-points-on-left-behind-and-the-secret-rapture-1/)

Cornelis Venema has an interesting commentary on the Revelation 20 passage at [*http://graceonlinelibrary.org/eschatology/revelation-20/revelation-20-part-ii-the-millennium-is-now-by-cornelis-p-venema/*](http://graceonlinelibrary.org/eschatology/revelation-20/revelation-20-part-ii-the-millennium-is-now-by-cornelis-p-venema/)

Thomas Shreiner has a commentary on Revelation 20 at [*https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-is-the-millenium-revelation-20/*](https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-is-the-millenium-revelation-20/)

Peter Krol has a helpful discussion of the “man of lawlessness” at [*https://www.knowableword.com/2021/10/01/context-matters-the-man-of-lawlessness/*](https://www.knowableword.com/2021/10/01/context-matters-the-man-of-lawlessness/)

John Piper has several very good sermons on 1 Thessalonians at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/1-thessalonians?page=3*](https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/1-thessalonians?page=3)

**SLEEPING THROUGH JESUS**Alexander Maclaren at [*https://www.preceptaustin.org/maclaren\_on\_1thessalonians#faith*](https://www.preceptaustin.org/maclaren_on_1thessalonians%23faith)

‘Them also which sleep in Jesus’ — [1 Thessalonians 4:14](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Thess%204.14).

THAT expression is not unusual, in various forms, in the Apostle’s writings. It suggests a very tender and wonderful thought of closeness and union between our Lord and the living dead, so close as that He is, as it were, the atmosphere in which they move, or the house in which they dwell But, tender and wonderful as the thought is, it is not exactly the Apostle’s idea here. For, accurately rendered — and accuracy in regard to Scripture language is not pedantry — the words run, ‘Them which sleep through Jesus.’

Now, that is a strange phrase, and, I suppose, its strangeness is the reason why our translators have softened it down to the more familiar and obvious ‘in Jesus.’ We can understand living through Christ, on being sacred through Christ, ‘but what can sleeping through Christ mean? I shall hope to answer the question presently, but, in the meantime, I only wish to point out what the Apostle does say, and to plead for letting him say it, strange though it sounds. For the strange and the difficult phrases of Scripture are like the hard quartz reefs in which gold is, and if we slur them over we are likely to loose the treasure. Let us try if we can find what the gold here may be.

Now, there are only two thoughts that I wish to dwell upon as suggested by these words. One is the softened aspect of death, and of the state of the Christian dead; and the other is the ground or cause of that softened aspect.

I. First, then, the softened aspect of death, and of the state of the Christian dead.

It is to Jesus primarily that the New Testament writers owe their use of this gracious emblem of sleep. For, as you remember, the word was twice upon our Lord’s tips; once when, over the twelve-years-old maid from whom life had barely ebbed away, He said, ‘She is not dead, but sleepeth’; and once when in regard of the man Lazarus, from whom life had removed further, He said, ‘Our friend sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.’ But Jesus was not the originator of the expression. You find it in the Old Testament, where the prophet Daniel, speaking of the end of the days and the bodily Resurrection, designates those who share in it as ‘them that sleep in the dust of the earth.’ And the Old Testament was not the sole origin of the phrase. For it is too natural, too much in accordance with the visibilities of death, not to have suggested itself to many hearts, and been shrined in many languages. Many an inscription of Greek and Roman date speaks of death under this figure; but almost always it is with the added, deepened note of despair, that it is a sleep which knows no waking, but lasts through eternal night.

Now, the Christian thought associated with this emblem is the precise opposite of the pagan one. The pagan heart shrank from naming the ugly thing because it was so ugly. So dark and deep a dread coiled round the man, as he contemplated it, that he sought to drape the dreadfulness in some kind of thin, transparent veil, and to put the buffer of a word between him and its hideousness. But the Christian’s motive for the use of the word is the precise opposite. He uses the gentler expression because the thing has become gentler.

It is profoundly significant that throughout the whole of the New Testament the plain, naked word ‘death’ is usually applied, not to the physical fact which we ordinarily designate by the name, but to the grim thing of which that physical fact is only the emblem and the parable, viz., the true death which lies in the separation of the soul from God; whilst predominately the New Testament usage calls the physical fact by some other gentler form of expression, because, as I say, the gentleness has enfolded the thing to be designated.

For instance, you find one class of representations which speak of death as being a departing and a being with Christ; or which call it, as one of the apostles does, an ‘exodus,’ where it is softened down to be merely a change of environment, a change of locality. Then another class of representations speak of it as ‘putting off this my tabernacle,’ or, the dissolution of the ‘earthly house’ — where there is a broad, firm line of demarcation drawn between the inhabitant and the habitation, and the thing is softened down to be a mere change of dwelling. Again, another class of expressions speak of it as being an ‘offering,’ where the main idea is that of a voluntary surrender, a sacrifice or libation of myself, and my life poured out upon the altar of God. But sweetest, deepest, most appealing to all our hearts, is that emblem of my text, ‘them that sleep.’ It is used, if I count rightly, some fourteen times in the New Testament, and it carries with it large and plain lessons, on which I touch but for a moment. What, then, does this metaphor say to us?

Well, it speaks first of rest. That is not altogether an attractive conception to some of us. If it be taken exclusively it is by no means wholesome. I suppose that the young, and the strong, and the eager, and the ambitious, and the prosperous rather shrink from the notion of their activities being stiffened into slumber. But, dear friends, there are some of us like tired children in a fair, who would fain have done with the weariness, who have made experience of the distractions and bewildering changes, whose backs are stiffened with toil, whose hearts are heavy with loss. And to all of us, in some moods, the prospect of shuffling off this weary coil of responsibilities and duties and tasks and sorrows, and of passing into indisturbance and repose, appeals. I believe, for my part, that, after all, the deepest longing of men — though they search for it through toil and effort — is for repose. As the poet has taught us, ‘there is no joy but calm.’ Every heart is weary enough, and heavy laden, and labouring enough, to feel the sweetness of a promise of rest:

‘Sleep, full of rest from head to foot, Lie still, dry dust, secure of change.’

Yes! but the rest of which our emblem speaks is, as I believe, only applicable to the bodily frame. The word ‘sleep’ is a transcript of what sense enlightened by faith sees in that still form, with the folded hands and the quiet face and the closed eyes. But let us remember that this repose, deep and blessed as it is, is not, as some would say, the repose of unconsciousness. I do not believe, and I would have you not believe, that this emblem refers to the vigorous, spiritual life, or that the passage from out of the toll and moil of earth into the calm of the darkness beyond has any power in limiting or suspending the vital force of the man.

Why, the very metaphor itself tells us that the sleeper is not unconscious. He is parted from the outer world, he is unaware of externals. When Stephen knelt below the old wall, and was surrounded by howling fanatics that slew him, one moment he was gashed with stones and tortured, and the next ‘he fell on sleep.’ They might howl, and the stones fly as they would, and he was all unaware of it. Like Jonah sleeping in the hold, what mattered the roaring of the storm to him? But separation from externals does not mean suspense of life or of consciousness, and the slumberer often dreams, and is aware of himself persistently throughout his slumber.

Nay! some of his faculties are set at liberty to work more energetically, because his connection with the outer world is for the time suspended.

And so I say that what on the hither side is sleep, on the further side is awaking, and that the complex whole of the condition of the sainted dead may be described with equal truth by either metaphor; ‘they sleep in Jesus’; or, ‘when I awake I shall be satisfied with Thy likeness.’

Scripture, as it seems to me, distinctly carries this limitation of the emblem. For what does it mean when the Apostle says that to depart and to be with Christ is far better? Surely he who thus spoke conceived that these two things were contemporaneous, the departing and the being with Him. And surely he who thus spoke could not have conceived that a millennium-long parenthesis of slumberous unconsciousness was to intervene between the moment of his decease and the moment of his fellowship with Jesus. How could a man prefer that dormant state to the state here, of working for and living with the Lord? Surely, being with Him must mean that we know where we are, and who is our companion.

And what does that text mean: ‘Ye are come unto the spirits of just men made perfect,’ unless it means that of these two classes of persons who are thus regarded as brought into living fellowship, each is aware of the other? Does perfecting of the spirit mean the smiting of the spirit into unconsciousness? Surely not, and surely in view of such words as these, we must recognise the fact that, however limited and imperfect may be the present connection of the disembodied dead, who sleep in Christ, with external things, they know themselves, they know their home and their companion, and they know the blessedness in which they are lapped.

But another thought which is suggested by this emblem is, as I have already said, most certainly the idea of awaking. The pagans said, as indeed one of their poets has it, ‘Suns can sink and return, but for us, when our brief light sinks, there is but one perpetual night of slumber.’ The Christian idea of death is, that it is transitory as a sleep in the morning, and sure to end. As St. Augustine says somewhere, ‘Wherefore are they called sleepers, but because in the day of the Lord they will be reawakened?’

And so these are the thoughts, very imperfectly spoken, I know, which spring like flowers from this gracious metaphor ‘them that sleep ‘ — rest and awaking; rest and consciousness.

II. Note the ground of this softened aspect.

They ‘sleep through Him.’ It is by reason of Christ and His work, and by reason of that alone, that death’s darkness is made beautiful, and death’s grimness is softened down to this. Now, in order to grasp the full meaning of such words as these of the Apostle, we must draw a broad distinction between the physical fact o£ the ending of corporeal life and the mental condition which is associated with it by us. What we call death, if I may so say, is a complex thing — a bodily phenomenon plus conscience, the sense of sin, the certainty of retribution in the dim beyond. And you have to take these elements apart. The former remains, but if the others are removed, the whole has changed its character and is become another thing, and a very little thing.

The mere physical fact is a trifle. Look at it as you see it in the animals; look at it as you see it in men when they actually come to it. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is painless and easy, and men sink into slumber. Strange, is it not, that so small a reality should have power to cast over human life so immense and obscuring a shadow! Why? Because, as the Apostle says, ‘the sting of death is sin,’ and if you can take the sting out of it, then there is very little to fear, and it comes down to be an insignificant and transient element in our experience.

Now, the death of Jesus Christ takes away, if I may so say, the nimbus of apprehension and dread arising from conscience and sin, and the forecast of retribution. There is nothing left for us to face except the physical fact, and any rough soldier, with a coarse, red coat upon him, will face that for eighteenpence a day, and think himself well paid. Jesus Christ has abolished death, leaving the mere shell, but taking all the substance out of it. It has become a different thing to men, because in that death of His He has exhausted the bitterness, and has made it possible that we should pass into the shadow, and not fear either conscience or sin or judgment.

In this connection I cannot but notice with what a profound meaning the Apostle, in this very verse, uses the bare, naked word in reference to Him, and the softened one in reference to us. ‘If we believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again, even so them also which sleep.’ Ah! yes! He died indeed, bearing all that terror with which men’s consciences have invested death. He died indeed, bearing on Himself the sins of the world. He died that no man henceforward need ever die in that same fashion, His death makes our deaths sleep, and His Resurrection makes our sleep calmly certain of a waking.

So, dear ‘brethren, I would not have you ignorant concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope.’ And I would have you to remember that, whilst Christ by His work has made it possible that the terror may pass away, and death may be softened and minimised into slumber, it will not be so with you — unless you are joined to Him, and by trust in the power of His death and the overflowing might of His Resurrection, have made sure that what He has passed through, you will pass through, and where He is, and what He is, you will be also.

Two men die by one railway accident, sitting side by side upon one seat, smashed in one collision. But though the outward fact is the same about each, the reality of their deaths is infinitely different. The one falls asleep through Jesus, in Jesus; the other dies indeed, and the death of his body is only a feeble shadow of the death of his spirit. Do you knit yourself to the Life, which is Christ, and then ‘he that believeth on Me shall never die,’

# The Return of Christ

An Essay By [Alan S. Bandy](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/profile/alan-s-bandy/)

#### Definition

The Return, Second Coming, or Second Advent of Christ refers to the future return of Christ to earth at the end of the age. This return will be visible and physical as he comes from heaven on the clouds to bring final judgment and salvation.

#### Summary

The New Testament establishes the doctrine of the Second Coming. Jesus refers to his future return in glory. While the term “Second Coming” or “Second Advent” does not occur in the New Testament, there are several nouns and verbs used to refer to the return of Christ. The nature of the Second Coming is visible, imminent, and final. The hope believers have of his return gives confidence of his victory and the salvation of their mortal bodies from sin once and for all to have a glorified resurrected body that is pure, immortal, and incorruptible ([1Cor. 15:35-49](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%2015%3A35-49/)). The Second Coming, then, has implications for how believers live day to day in an attitude of watchfulness and readiness.

### ****Introduction****

The doctrine of the Second Coming or Advent of Christ refers to the future return of Christ to earth at the end of the age. This return will be visible and physical as he comes down from heaven on the clouds to bring final judgment and salvation. It is often associated with the great day of the Lord in the Old Testament and corresponds to the messianic prophecies anticipating the messiah coming as King of kings in victory and glory to triumph over all the enemies of God and his people. The New Testament focuses primarily on the messiah’s first advent with the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus who came as a sinless sacrificial lamb to make atonement for sin and provide salvation through faith in him by inaugurating the New Covenant. The New Testament also contains numerous references to the second advent of Christ who will come again to bring all things and all history to its proper conclusion. This essay will discuss some of the key passages and terms in the New Testament associated with the Second Coming, then seek to draw some conclusions about the nature of Christ return and highlight some implications of this doctrine.

### ****New Testament Terms and Passages Referring to the Second Coming of Christ****

The New Testament unambiguously establishes the doctrine of the Second Coming. Jesus refers to his future return in glory. It is also affirmed, expounded upon, and taught in the letters of Paul, James, Peter, and John. The Book of Revelation anticipates his “soon” return and gloriously depicts it in chapter 19. Although we may file this under the heading of the “Second Coming” or “Second Advent,” the New Testament does not use those terms. The expression “Second Coming” seems to have originated with Justin Martyr in the 2nd century.[1](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-return-of-christ/#footnote-1) Nevertheless, there are a number of ways and terms the New Testament speaks of the Second Coming.

**Nouns Used to refer to the Second Coming**

One of the most common nouns used in the NT to refer to the Second Coming of Christ is parousia (e.g., [Matt. 24:3](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2024%3A3/); [1Thes. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Thes.%202%3A19%3B%203%3A13%3B%204%3A15%3B%205%3A23/); [2Thes. 2:1, 8](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Thes.%202%3A1%2C%208/); [Jas. 5:7–8](https://www.esv.org/verses/Jas.%205%3A7%E2%80%938/); [2Pet. 3:4, 12](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Pet.%203%3A4%2C%2012/); [1Jn. 2:28](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Jn.%202%3A28/)). The basic meaning of the term is “presence” or “arrival.” While it is used generally to speak of people coming to be present as opposed to absent ([2Cor. 7:6-7; 10:10](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Cor.%207%3A6-7%3B%2010%3A10/); [Phil. 1:26](https://www.esv.org/verses/Phil.%201%3A26/)), it became a technical term in the early church to refer to the eschatological coming of Christ at the end of the age. In [1 Corinthians 15:20–26](https://www.esv.org/verses/1%20Corinthians%2015%3A20%E2%80%9326/), Paul lays out the future expectation of the believers’ resurrection from the dead at the coming (parousia) of Christ:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming [parousia] those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

It is used in the Olivet Discourse of [Matthew 23](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matthew%2023/), where Jesus famously predicts the destruction of the Temple and signs associated with his return at the end of the age. After sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples come to him asking him “when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming [parousia] and of the end of the age?” In [Matthew 24:27](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matthew%2024%3A27/), Jesus says, “For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man.” Jesus goes on to compare his second coming to the days of Noah:

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man ([Matt. 24:36-39](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2024%3A36-39/)).

The coming of the Son of Man used in this context is eschatological and refers to his return with finality. Interestingly, from the Ptolemaic period down into the 2nd century a.d. the word parousia was a technical term for the arrival of a visiting king or important person. The association of parousia with the arrival of a King to a city naturally lends itself to becoming the most common term for the Second Coming of the King of kings.

Although parousia is the primary noun to refer to the Second Coming, there are a few other terms used to refer to it. Paul uses the term “appearing” (epiphaneia) once for his first coming ([2Tim. 1:10](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Tim.%201%3A10/)), but usually it refers to his Second Coming in glory and judgment ([2Thes. 2:8](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Thes.%202%3A8/); [1Tim. 6:14](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Tim.%206%3A14/); [2Tim. 4:1, 8](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Tim.%204%3A1%2C%208/); [Titus 2:13](https://www.esv.org/verses/Titus%202%3A13/)). The language of appearing is closely related to “revelation” (apokalypsis), which is also used to refer to Christ’s Second Coming ([1Thes. 1:7](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Thes.%201%3A7/); [1Cor. 1:7, 2](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%201%3A7%2C%202/); 1Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13). Both terms emphasize the visible nature of his return as opposed to something hidden from view, secret, or merely his spiritual presence among us.

Lastly, the Second Coming of Christ is referred to simply as “the day” ([Rom. 13:12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom.%2013%3A12/); [1Cor. 3:13](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%203%3A13/); [Heb. 10:25](https://www.esv.org/verses/Heb.%2010%3A25/)). It is often coupled with qualifiers to more clearly designate it as Jesus’ return such as “the day of Christ” ([Phil. 1:10; 2:16](https://www.esv.org/verses/Phil.%201%3A10%3B%202%3A16/)), “the day of the Lord” ([1Thes. 5:2](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Thes.%205%3A2/); [2Thes. 2:2](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Thes.%202%3A2/)), “the day of the Lord Jesus” ([1Cor. 5:5](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%205%3A5/); [2Cor. 1:14](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Cor.%201%3A14/)), “the day of Jesus Christ” ([Phil. 1:6](https://www.esv.org/verses/Phil.%201%3A6/)), “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” ([1Cor. 1:8](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%201%3A8/)), and “the day of God” ([2Pet. 3:12](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Pet.%203%3A12/)).[2](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-return-of-christ/#footnote-2) There is a two-sided aspect to the day when Jesus returns as positive and negative. For believers it is a day of salvation and redemption as their glorious hope ([Phil. 1:6](https://www.esv.org/verses/Phil.%201%3A6/); [1Cor. 1:8](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%201%3A8/); [2Tim. 1:12; 4:8](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Tim.%201%3A12%3B%204%3A8/); [Eph. 4:30](https://www.esv.org/verses/Eph.%204%3A30/)). However, for the unbelievers and wicked it is the day of judgment and wrath ([1Jn. 4:17](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Jn.%204%3A17/); [Rom. 2:5, 16](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom.%202%3A5%2C%2016/)). Those who belong to him will watch and be ready for that day, but unbelievers will be caught by surprise and off guard as by a thief in the night ([1Thes. 5:2-11](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Thes.%205%3A2-11/)).

**Verbs Used to Refer to the Second Coming**

Jesus, the Messiah, was the long awaited promised one whose coming is now understood in two distinct advents. As such, there are references to his first advent where he is called the “coming one” or “he who comes” ([Matt. 3:11; 21:9](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%203%3A11%3B%2021%3A9/); [Luke 19](https://www.esv.org/verses/Luke%2019/)). He is also coming again to fulfill all things ([2Thes. 1:10](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Thes.%201%3A10/); [Rev. 1:7; 22:7](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rev.%201%3A7%3B%2022%3A7/)). There are numerous instances where the verb for “come” (erchomai) is used in reference to Jesus coming again in the clouds “with power and great glory” ([Matt. 24:30](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2024%3A30/); [Mark 13:26](https://www.esv.org/verses/Mark%2013%3A26/); [Luke 21:27](https://www.esv.org/verses/Luke%2021%3A27/)). That Jesus comes with the clouds derives from the Old Testament where clouds are associated with a representation of divine glory ([Dan. 7:13-14](https://www.esv.org/verses/Dan.%207%3A13-14/); [Exod. 40:34](https://www.esv.org/verses/Exod.%2040%3A34/); [1Kgs. 8:10-11](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Kgs.%208%3A10-11/)) so that Jesus will come in divine glory. Jesus exhorts his disciples to watch with readiness because they do not know the exact day or hour the Lord is “coming” ([Matt. 24:42, 50](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2024%3A42%2C%2050/), [Mark 13:33, 35](https://www.esv.org/verses/Mark%2013%3A33%2C%2035/); [Luke 12:40-46; 21:34](https://www.esv.org/verses/Luke%2012%3A40-46%3B%2021%3A34/)). Jesus will “come” with his angels and sit on his throne to separate his sheep from the goats and reward his servants ([Matt. 25:31-34](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2025%3A31-34/)). As Jesus was preparing his disciples for his ascension back to the father, he comforted the them with the promise that “If I go away … I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also” ([John 14:3](https://www.esv.org/verses/John%2014%3A3/)). When he ascended, Angels said to the disciples, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven” ([Acts 1:11](https://www.esv.org/verses/Acts%201%3A11/)). At his coming he will bring all hidden things to light including the intentions of people’s hearts so that his judgment is true and just ([1Cor. 4:5](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%204%3A5/)). He will come in glory with his saints ([2Thes. 1:10](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Thes.%201%3A10/)). He is coming soon and he will come in the clouds in victory, power, and glory and every eye will see him ([Rev. 1:7, 8; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rev.%201%3A7%2C%208%3B%203%3A11%3B%2022%3A7%2C%2012%2C%2020/)).

Other verbs used for the Second Coming are “appear ([1Jn. 2:28; 3:2](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Jn.%202%3A28%3B%203%3A2/)), “revealed” ([Luke 17:30](https://www.esv.org/verses/Luke%2017%3A30/)), and “descend” ([1Thes. 4:16](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Thes.%204%3A16/)).

### ****The Nature of Christ’s Return****

The nature of the Second Coming is visible, imminent, and final. Jesus promised the disciples he would not leave them as orphans by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in them and in that why the presence of Christ already dwells in believers ([John 14:18-26](https://www.esv.org/verses/John%2014%3A18-26/); [Rom 8:9](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom%208%3A9/)), but that is not what is meant by the return of Christ. He will return visibly and publicly in a way that all people will see him coming in the clouds ([Matt. 24:27](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2024%3A27/); [Rev. 1:7](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rev.%201%3A7/)). As such, any notion that he will come secretly or that someone may have missed it is misguided because there will be no doubt about it when it happens ([2Thes. 2:2](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Thes.%202%3A2/)).

The return of Christ is also imminent, meaning it is near and when it comes it will happen quickly. The fact that we cannot know with any certainty about exactly when Jesus will return is clear when Jesus states, “Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming…. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” ([Matt. 24:42; 25:13](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2024%3A42%3B%2025%3A13/)). Early Christians anticipated that Christ could return in their lifetime and admonished believers to watch and be ready. Because the specific time of Christ’s return is unknowable, believers are exhorted to be prepared by purifying their lives from sin and living in obedience to Christ daily.

The imminent return of Christ, however, does not mean it could happen at any moment without any preconditioned fulfillment of prophecies or signs. Paul told the Thessalonians they were children of the light, and therefore they would not be taken by sudden surprise, like a thief ([1Thes. 5:1–5](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Thes.%205%3A1%E2%80%935/)). There are at least three events that are mentioned as taking place before the second coming: (1) the gospel preached to all the nations; (2) the great tribulation and the great apostasy; and (3) the coming of the Antichrist. The point is certain things must happen before Christ returns but exactly how and where these signs are fulfilled is difficult to say. Consequently, we must always be open to the possibility that Christ could return at any time. Thus, although certain “signs” have been present throughout history, such signs will intensify before Christ returns. That is, these signs will become clearer before they reach their climax. Imminence does not necessitate suddenness devoid of potential indicators.

The return of Christ is also final and unalterable. He will come in victory and judgment. While he first came as a babe in a manger and lived gently and humbly, when he comes again he will come as King of kings and Lord of lords. Revelation powerfully depicts his return as a triumphant warrior king and judge in [Revelation 19:11-16](https://www.esv.org/verses/Revelation%2019%3A11-16/):

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

At his return, every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will bend to his sovereign majesty and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord ([Phil. 2:10-11](https://www.esv.org/verses/Phil.%202%3A10-11/)). He will come as true judge to reward his saints and judge the wicked ([Rev. 11:18](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rev.%2011%3A18/)). It is the day when, according to Paul’s gospel, “God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” ([Rom. 2:16](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom.%202%3A16/)). Jesus will establish his rule and reign over all nations, he will set all thing to rights, and he will rule with a rod of iron so that his will is done on earth just as it is done in heaven.

### ****Implications of the Second Coming****

The Second Coming of Christ is a necessary feature of the Gospel message. Christ’s first coming brought salvation through his death and resurrection, but his second coming will bring about the resurrection of our bodies which is the final goal and hope of our salvation ([1Cor. 15:20-28](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%2015%3A20-28/); [Rom. 6:5-10, 8:23](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom.%206%3A5-10%2C%208%3A23/); [Phil. 3:10-11, 21](https://www.esv.org/verses/Phil.%203%3A10-11%2C%2021/)). The hope we have of his return is more than an addendum to the Gospel. It gives us the confidence of his victory and the salvation of our mortal bodies from sin once and for all to have a glorified resurrected body that is pure, immortal, and incorruptible ([1Cor. 15:35-49](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%2015%3A35-49/)). The Second Coming, then, has implications for how we live our lives from day to day. Paul sums it up well when he writes: “… training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ…” ([Titus 2:12-13](https://www.esv.org/verses/Titus%202%3A12-13/)). Waiting for his return is not passive, it is an active purifying of our lives in the pursuit of holiness in readiness for our Lord. John tells us that as Children of God, we will be like Jesus when he appears and “And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure” ([1Jn. 3:3](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Jn.%203%3A3/)). To watch with readiness for his return means we conduct our lives in such a way as to please him rather than be ashamed when he appears. Another implication of his return is that we can trust him to judge and make all things right when he comes. No matter what trials, suffering, of challenges we face here and now it is only temporary. We are to refrain from seeking revenge or judging people, because we can entrust that the true and worthy judge will deal justice according to truth ([1Cor. 4:5](https://www.esv.org/verses/1Cor.%204%3A5/); [Rom. 12:19](https://www.esv.org/verses/Rom.%2012%3A19/)). Finally, any delay in the Lord’s return is to allow more time for people to come to repentance and find salvation ([2Pet. 3:9](https://www.esv.org/verses/2Pet.%203%3A9/)). There will be no hope of salvation for the lost after Jesus comes, today is the day of salvation. It is imperative that we share the gospel and hope salvation in Christ by grace through faith.

#### Footnotes

1L. Morris, “Parousia,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Rev. ed. (Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed., Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 664.

2Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Second Coming of Christ,” in the *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1918–1919.

#### Further Reading

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