

The following study presents beliefs and ideas for you to ponder, explore, and perhaps make your own.

The Second Coming

If we believe in a God of infinite power and love, then how does this saga of Planet Earth end? Clearly the world is troubled; sin is still making advances; diseases kill and wars wipe out thousands. The line in the Lord's Prayer — Thy will be done — is only being fulfilled in fits and starts. At some future point, God's triumph will be total; evil will disappear; eternity will commence under the gracious, galactic rule of Jesus.



Photo: Dreamstime

What does the Bible tell us about this blessed hope?

Timing. The key reality is: we don't know. In God's wisdom, He simply tells His children to be in constant, optimistic readiness. "No one knows about that day or hour," Jesus said while here among us, "not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). Many of Jesus' parables encouraged Christians to faithfully keep watch and look forward eagerly to the Second Coming.

Nevertheless, God graciously does offer a plethora of signs so we can know we are not waiting endlessly. These include:

1. Natural wonders and disasters: an increase in wars, famines, earthquakes. Luke 21:25 even predicts: There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. Our protective God is forced to withdraw parts of His supernatural sustaining power; our fragile planet is breaking down. Global warming and depletion of resources point to a cataclysmic conclusion.
2. Political and military upheaval. The late Peter Jennings compiled a book, *The Century*, a chronicle of the great events of the 20th century. It is disheartening to read how our world almost determinedly lurches from one brutal war to another. Terrorists' roadside bombs are a stubborn scourge in many battle theaters today.
3. The prophetic timeline of Daniel and Revelation prophecies. Both Daniel 2 and 7 provide a futuristic outline of four world empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome), then the tumult and European political intrigue of the Middle Ages, and finally the triumphant debut of Christ's kingdom, represented by a rock cut out without human hands (2:34, 35). Revelation also gives details about end-time religious tyranny, economic boycotts against God's loyal community of believers (13:17), and an end-time judgment scenario. All these indicators give us confidence that the last moments of history are rapidly coming upon us.

4. The gospel going to an increasingly cynical world. The good news: by Jesus' own guarantee, the Calvary message will successfully beam around the planet. "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" (Matthew 24:14). For long decades, the U.S.S.R. — a totalitarian police state — was a determinedly atheist society. A muscular Kremlin communicated its propaganda across its nine tightly knit time zones with a well-regulated state radio network. Once the openness of glasnost swept away the barriers, Christians were able to blanket the former empire, sharing Jesus on those same stations!

The challenge mirroring this miracle is that Scripture predicts an increase in godlessness and a growing apathy even among spiritual people. Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

The Manner of His Coming. Two words: brace yourselves! Because the Bible promises a thrilling conclusion!

1. Visible and loud. When Jesus ascended into the clouds as a resurrected, physical Man, angels promised He would come back in like manner (Acts 1:11). No one will miss the Second Coming: it will be visible — every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7) — and impressively thunderous. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command [KJV: shout], with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Jesus will come in His Father's glory with His angels (Matthew 16:27); there will be lightning (24:27). The Bible does warn: The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2), but in light of these vivid splendors, it seems probable that the metaphor refers to the unexpectedness of Jesus' return, not the sensory intensity of this once-in-a-lifetime moment! Safely armed with these details, we can avoid being deceived by false christs who surreptitiously appear — but only in someone else's remote neighborhood (Matthew 24:23-26).

2. Resurrection and Desolation. When Jesus appears, the redeemed of every age will come to life (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Those fortunate enough to be alive for this climactic victory will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (v. 17). In one grand, transformative moment, the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53). Death's sting will be forever erased (v. 55). On the other hand, people who have resolutely resisted the many calls of the Holy Spirit will be seized with terror and devastation at what they have lost. There will be actual physical upheaval of the landscape as Jesus descends in the clouds; everyone who has spurned or dreaded this moment will welcome destruction as the terrain shakes and the rocks fall

(Revelation 6:16).

A recent Hollywood film gives us a beautiful picture of how we will feel when Jesus rescues us. Captain Phillips and his crew had to battle Somali pirates who forced their way aboard the Maersk Alabama and demanded a ransom. Evil and jeopardy reigned for most of the story; it is a tale of sorrow, struggle, and the fallen, desperate state of our sinful world. Really, no ending would satisfy except for the bad guys to be wiped out.

The film's moving conclusion is when Tom Hanks is finally rescued and tenderly taken to the ship's sick bay. He is going into shock; his life has been in constant jeopardy for days and nights on end. Finally he is safe. There are nurses to care for him. He will see his loved ones again. And this brave man's fragile, collapsing relief is a glorious thing to experience as the music swells. The score's closing song is entitled, appropriately, "Safe Now."

It makes me anticipate the second coming of our Lord. The human race has endured battles. Piracy. 9/11. The Oklahoma City bombing and two world wars and the Holocaust. Floods and the 2004 tsunami which washed over the shores of my beloved Thailand. Lucifer has held our human race at gunpoint for so long. But finally it will be over. Angels will carry the wounded to God's healing hospital. The relief in our hearts will be palpable and eternal. No more pain, no more tears, no more sorrow, no more death, because the old order of things has passed away.

And yes, it's also true that the pirates will be forever gone.