

Motivated *by* Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Thess. 4:13–18; Matt. 24:27, 30, 31; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; Dan. 8:14; Dan. 9:20–27; Ezra 7:7–13.*

Memory Text: “And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’ ” (*Isaiah 25:9, NKJV*).

The second coming of Jesus is one of the central themes of Scripture. It is a golden thread that runs through the Bible's sacred pages. One scholar has estimated that there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament. In the 260 chapters of the New Testament, there are more than 300 references to the return of Christ. One in every 25 verses mentions it. Twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event.

After the Reformation in Europe foundered and was hampered by divisions and strife, Protestantism took root in the New World, including the United States, where many sought to pick up the mantle of truth, including the truth about the Second Coming.

Among them was a Baptist farmer named William Miller. From his study of the Bible, he believed that Jesus was coming soon, even in his lifetime, and then began preaching that message. Miller started a movement that, though facing a great disappointment, opened up to many people Bible truths that remain relevant to this day.

In this week's lesson, we will examine why the second coming of Christ has filled the hearts of believers with joy through the centuries and how we can be ready for that great event.

* *Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 18–21 of The Great Controversy, to prepare for Sabbath, May 18.*

The Promise of His Return

The Protestant Reformers and the pilgrims who left from Holland for the New World longed for the coming of Jesus. For them the second coming of Christ was a joyous event that they eagerly anticipated. John Wycliffe looked forward to the coming of Christ as the hope of the church. Calvin spoke for all the Reformers when he talked of the glorious return of Christ as “of all events most auspicious.” For faithful men and women of God, the second coming of Christ was something to be embraced, not something to be feared.

Read John 14:1–3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, and Titus 2:11–14. Why did these Bible passages give such hope to Christians through the centuries?

It is easy to understand why a belief in the second coming of Christ has brought such hope and joy to Bible-believing Christians. It points forward to the end of sickness, suffering, and death. It ushers in the end of poverty, injustice, and oppression. It anticipates the end of strife, conflict, and war. It forecasts a future world of peace, happiness, and enduring fellowship with Christ and the redeemed of all ages forever.

“The coming of the Lord has been in all ages the hope of His true followers. The Saviour’s parting promise upon Olivet, that He would come again, lighted up the future for His disciples, filling their hearts with joy and hope that sorrow could not quench nor trials dim. Amid suffering and persecution, the ‘appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ’ was the ‘blessed hope.’ When the Thessalonian Christians were filled with grief as they buried their loved ones, who had hoped to live to witness the coming of the Lord, Paul, their teacher, pointed them to the resurrection, to take place at the Saviour’s advent. Then the dead in Christ should rise, and together with the living be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. ‘And so,’ he said, ‘shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.’ 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 302.

Why is the Second Coming so important to our faith? Especially because we know that the dead sleep (see lesson 10), why does this teaching take on such importance? Without it, why would we be, as Paul said, in an utterly hopeless situation (see 1 Cor. 15:15–18)?

Anticipating the Time

Although the Protestant Reformers believed in the literal, visible, audible, and glorious return of Christ, gradually the understanding of this biblical truth changed. Popular nineteenth-century preachers taught that Christ would come to establish His kingdom on earth and usher in 1,000 years of peace. This led to spiritual lethargy and an apathetic commitment to spiritual values.

Similarly, Christ's disciples misunderstood the nature of the Messiah's coming. They thought that He would come as a conquering general who would break the yoke of Roman bondage, not One who would deliver them from the condemnation and shackles of sin. Thus, they failed to understand the manner of His coming.

Read Acts 1:9–11; Revelation 1:7; and Matthew 24:27, 30, 31. What do these verses teach us about the manner of our Lord's return?

When Christ came the first time as a babe in Bethlehem's manger, very few people discerned His coming. But when He comes the second time, "every eye" will see Him come. Every ear will hear the trumpet blast of His return. Every human being on earth will behold His glory. We need not be deceived. The Scriptures have made the events surrounding His return abundantly clear.

"One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming to complete the great work of redemption. To God's pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in 'the region and shadow of death,' a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is 'the resurrection and the life,' to 'bring home again His banished.' The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures. From the day when the first pair turned their sorrowing steps from Eden, the children of faith have waited the coming of the Promised One to break the destroyer's power and bring them again to the lost Paradise."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 299.

An early Adventist leader, Luther Warren, used to tell young people, "The only way to be ready for the coming of Christ is to get ready and stay ready." The message of Christ's soon return is an urgent appeal to each one of us to examine our hearts and evaluate our spiritual lives. It is a call to godly living. There can be no neutrality in the blazing light of the glory of Christ's return.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:2–5 and Hebrews 9:28. What encouragement do these verses give us regarding the manner of Christ's coming?

William Miller and the Bible

Just as God used the Protestant Reformers to rediscover the truth about justification by faith in Christ alone, He used William Miller to rediscover the truth about the manner of Christ's second coming. As Miller studied Scripture, he discovered a Christ who loved him more than he could possibly imagine. With his Bible, a pen, and a notebook, he began reading starting with Genesis and read no faster than he could understand the passage at hand. By comparing scripture with scripture, he allowed the Bible to explain itself.

Read Isaiah 28:9, 10; Proverbs 8:8, 9; John 16:13; and 2 Peter 1:19–21. What principles of Bible interpretation do you discover in these passages?

As William Miller compared scripture with scripture, the mysteries of the Bible were opened to him. He searched as one searching for a hidden treasure and was richly rewarded. The Holy Spirit opened the Word of God to his understanding. He approached prophecy with the same diligence in Bible study as the other biblical passages he was studying.

Read Daniel 1:17; Daniel 2:45; 1 Peter 1:10, 11; and Revelation 1:1–3. What do these passages teach us about understanding the prophecies of the Bible?

The symbols in the prophetic books are not locked in mystery. A loving God has given us His prophetic Word to prepare us for the climactic events soon to unfold in this world. William Miller clearly understood that prophecy was its own best interpreter. The symbols of prophecy are made clear by the Bible itself. Beasts represent kings or kingdoms (*Dan. 7:17, 23*). Wind represents destruction (*Jer. 49:36*). Water represents peoples or nations (*Rev. 17:15*). A woman represents the church (*Jer. 6:2, Eph. 5:22–32*). The time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation also are given in symbolic language, with one prophetic day representing one literal year (*Num. 14:34, Ezek. 4:6*). As William Miller applied these principles of biblical interpretation, he was startled at what he discovered regarding what he believed to be the timing of Christ's return.

Why is a correct understanding of prophetic symbolism so important for our faith?

The 2,300 Days of Daniel 8:14

William Miller observed that events predicted by the prophets were precisely fulfilled: the 400 years of the sojourn of Abraham's descendants, Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the 70 years of Israel's captivity, and Daniel's 70 weeks allotted to Israel (*Gen. 15:13, Num. 14:34, Jer. 25:11, and Dan. 9:24*).

Read Mark 1:15, Galatians 4:4, and Romans 5:6. What do these verses tell us about God's timetable for the First Advent?

As Miller studied the prophecies, comparing scripture with scripture, he concluded that if God had a divine timetable throughout the Bible, God must have a divine timetable when it comes to our Lord's second coming.

Read Daniel 8:14. What event was to occur at the end of the 2,300 days?

William Miller accepted the popular view that the "cleansing of the sanctuary" was the purification of the earth by fire. He diligently studied the Scriptures to understand an event of such stupendous importance. He discovered the linkage between Daniel 8 and Daniel 9. In Daniel 8, the angel was instructed to "make this man understand the vision" (*Dan. 8:16*). By the end of the chapter, the only portion of the entire vision of Daniel 8 left unexplained (*see Dan. 8:27*) was the part about the 2,300 days. Later the angel returned to Daniel and declared, "I have now come forth to give you skill to understand" (*Dan. 9:22, NKJV; see also Dan. 9:23, 25–27*). This was to help him understand about the 2,300 days.

We know this because, after bidding Daniel to "consider the matter, and understand the vision" (*Dan. 9:23, NKJV*), the first words of the angel were: "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city" (*Dan. 9:24, NKJV*). The word translated "determined" literally means "cut off." Seventy weeks, 490 years, are to be cut off. But from what? The vision of the 2,300 days, obviously—the only part of Daniel 8 that Daniel did not understand, and that the angel now came to explain.

And since the starting point of the 70 weeks was "from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem" (*Dan. 9:25, NKJV*), Miller knew that if he had that date, he could know the beginning of the 70 weeks and the 2,300-day prophecy.

The Longest Prophetic Time Line

Read Ezra 7:7–13. When was the decree issued to allow Israel’s captives in Persia to go free to rebuild their temple?

The decree was issued by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, in 457 B.C. This decree was the last of three decrees to allow the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem and restore temple worship services. This third decree was the most complete and marks the beginning of the 2,300-day prophecy.

Read Daniel 9:25, 26. When would this entire prophetic period begin? What major events do these verses predict?

In this remarkable prophecy, Daniel predicted that from the “going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” to the Messiah would be 69 prophetic weeks, or 483 prophetic days, or literal years. Since the decree went forth in the fall of 457 B.C., 483 years extend to the fall of A.D. 27. The word “Messiah” signifies “the Anointed One.” In the autumn of A.D. 27, Christ was baptized and received the anointing of the Spirit (*Acts 10:38*). After His baptism, Jesus went into Galilee, “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled’ ” (*Mark 1:14, 15, NKJV*).

In the spring of A.D. 31, in the middle of this last prophetic week, three and a half years after His baptism, Jesus was crucified. The system of offerings that pointed forward to the Lamb of God ended with Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. Type had met antitype, and eventually all the sacrifices and offerings of the ceremonial system ceased.

Read Daniel 9:27. How would the 70-week prophecy end?

The 70 weeks, or 490 years, especially allotted to the Jews, ended in A.D. 34 with the rejection by the Sanhedrin of the gospel message (*Acts 6:8–7:60*).

Subtracting 490 years from the 2,300-year prophecy leaves 1,810 years for the completion of the prophecy. This leads us to A.D. 1844. William Miller and the early Adventists believed that the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 was the earth, and they assumed that Christ would come to purify the earth by fire in 1844. (*See the chart on Friday.*)

Further Thought: Look at the following chart for the prophecies of the 70 weeks and the 2,300 days. The prophecies start in 457 B.C. and foretell the events surrounding “Messiah the Prince,” upon whom the 70-week prophecy is grounded. With that solid foundation, the 2,300-day prophecy ends in the year 1844.

2,300 days (2,300 years)		
70 weeks (490 years)		1,810 years
457 B.C.	A.D. 34	1844

“Like the first disciples, William Miller and his associates did not, themselves, fully comprehend the import of the message which they bore. Errors that had been long established in the church prevented them from arriving at a correct interpretation of an important point in the prophecy. Therefore, though they proclaimed the message which God had committed to them to be given to the world, yet through a misapprehension of its meaning they suffered disappointment.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 351, 352.

“Yet God accomplished His own beneficent purpose in permitting the warning of the judgment to be given just as it was. The great day was at hand, and in His providence the people were brought to the test of a definite time, in order to reveal to them what was in their hearts. The message was designed for the testing and purification of the church. They were to be led to see whether their affections were set upon this world or upon Christ and heaven. They professed to love the Saviour; now they were to prove their love. Were they ready to renounce their worldly hopes and ambitions, and welcome with joy the advent of their Lord? The message was designed to enable them to discern their true spiritual state; it was sent in mercy to arouse them to seek the Lord with repentance and humiliation.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 353.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What lessons can we learn from William Miller’s experience? Does God at times overrule our mistaken understanding?
- ❷ Why is an understanding of Daniel 9:24–27 so significant in establishing the integrity of the Bible and the divinity of Christ?
- ❸ What role does understanding prophecy play in the plan of salvation? Why is prophecy so significant in the plan of God?

Unlocking Hearts

By F. EDGAR NUNES

On a recent Sabbath, two Syrian refugees attended the worship services at the Kingston Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Canadian province of Ontario. As the church's pastor, I rejoice at the sight of any visitor, but to be able to welcome a mother and daughter who belong to another world religion was an unexpected privilege. How did they hear about us? Who invited them to our worship service?

It turned out that long before they set foot in our church, the Syrian refugees had been befriended by one of the church members, Shirley.

Shirley has a big heart for strangers, especially refugees, and she greets people with a warm smile that melts barriers away. She loves to help in any way she can, and people are moved by her kindness and compassion. They readily accept her invitations to family dinners and summer picnics. The Syrian mother and daughter, Eman and Heba, accepted Shirley's invitation to come to church on Sabbath.

After the worship service, we visited outside the sanctuary. Eman and Heba seemed happy to talk and readily accepted my offer to pray for them. Afterward, I asked if they would be interested in a copy of the Gospel of John in Arabic, printed by the Canadian Bible Society.

"I won't be offended if you say, 'No,'" I said.

The mother accepted the book.

"We believe Jesus is a prophet, so we will read the book," she said.

A few days later, Shirley called to ask if I spoke "Sudanese."

"I have another family from Africa that I would like you to visit," she said.

Shirley's genuine love and warmth for strangers keeps unlocking hearts. Her example inspires us to follow Christ's method. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Shirley mingles with people, listening, serving, and showing disinterested love and acceptance, thereby breaking down the most formidable barriers. We also can go from heart to heart as Shirley does every day.

Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (*John 13:35, NKJV*). The love that reveals we are His disciples is the same power that opens the hearts of strangers and moves them to consider becoming His disciples.

This mission story illustrates Mission Objective No. 2, "To strengthen and diversify Adventist outreach in large cities, across the 10/40 Window, among unreached and under-reached people groups, and to non-Christian religions." For more information, go to the website: IWillGo2020.org.