

the thief a place with him in paradise (verse 43).

The same Jesus who graciously offered forgiveness to Jean and to that dying thief, now offers you salvation, complete pardon, and peace of mind. Discover it for yourself today.

You too can pray with the dying thief: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus will answer, "I will come back, and you will be with Me in paradise."

Dear Father in heaven: Thank You for the hope that Jesus will come again very soon. In times like these, when that coming is so near, the great longing of my heart is to live for You. I need Your power in my daily life. Help me every day to grow more and more like Jesus as I fellowship with You in Bible study and prayer. Help me to live my faith so that others will want to know Christ. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Design by Kurt Reichenbach

Litho in USA by Pacific Press

DISCOVER

HOW SOON WILL JESUS RETURN?



In 1978 a miracle drug was discovered which doubled the human life span.

In 1980 the internal combustion engine was outlawed in all major U.S. cities.

In 1981 Montana became America's first penal state. All criminals given prison sentences were sent there.

Between February and May of 1983 all the women in St. Louis lost their hair.

Did you miss any of these remarkable events? Probably so. Because none of these things ever happened. But all were confidently predicted by well-known psychics.

Most of us have an almost instinctive urge to peek into the future. We want to know what lies beyond the horizon. But accurate predictions remain terribly elusive. We have a difficult enough time forecasting tomorrow's weather!

There is Someone, however, whose prophecies have proven remarkably accurate. Jesus Christ, through His Word, can take us into the future; He's a reliable guide. In this lesson we're going to look at what He had to say about His Second Coming. After all, who could know more about the end of the world than the One who created it in the beginning?

1. SIGNS THAT CHRIST WILL RETURN IN OUR DAY

After Jesus assured His disciples that He would come back to our world a second time (John 14:1-3), what question did they ask Him?

“Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be THE SIGN OF YOUR COMING and of the end of the age?’”—Matthew 24:3. *(Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

Jesus answered clearly and positively. In chapter 24 of Matthew and chapter 21 of Luke He personally gave several “signs,” or evidences, by which we can know when His coming is near. Other Bible prophecies help fill out the picture, detailing world conditions just before Christ's return. As we'll see,

to wait for the Second Coming to find release from guilt, and from anxiety and destructive behavior. Jesus is quite willing to give you His kind of peace this very moment.

While a young woman named Jean was attending a religious meeting, she felt strangely moved by the gospel presentation. As she heard the story of a soon-coming Saviour unfold, all the pieces began to fit into place. This made sense. Jean decided that she'd been looking for love, happiness, and peace in all the wrong places. Jesus had to be the answer.

The next day when the evangelist and his associate went to see her, Jean poured out the story of a bitter and broken life. She'd sunk to the bottom as an alcoholic, and was supporting herself through prostitution. After describing her problems, she sobbed out, “You were really speaking to me last night.”

But the voice that had reached her heart was the voice of God. And He was speaking tenderly. Jean decided to lay it all on the line. She invited Christ to come into her heart as Saviour and Lord, and fastened onto the hope of His soon return.

In the weeks that followed, Jean began to notice that her many fears and insecurities, which she'd always tried to drown in drink, now found release as she spent time communicating with Jesus. He began to deliver her from the compulsions that had been wrecking her life.

Jean had done a lot of things she wasn't proud of. But Christ's grace and forgiveness proved stronger than her shame. The experience of the thief on the cross meant a lot to her. In his last, desperate hours he turned to the Innocent Sufferer beside him and asked, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

Jesus immediately answered by promising

3. JESUS, THE WORLD'S ONLY HOPE

People today are aware that our world is heading toward a crisis. Some desperately look for a way to prevent it. But all our technological advances, economic theories, and international organizations are still overwhelmed by global problems. Voices of reason and goodwill are

drowned by the fierce shouts of ethnic factions and sectarian zealots.

Above all this clamor, however, Jesus calmly and boldly declares, "I am the way!"

(John 14:6), and He promises,

"I will come back!" (verse 3).

Christ is the last, best hope for our world because only He can deal with the very thing that is destroying it—sin. Jesus died on Calvary to make possible the defeat of evil and deliverance for all who respond to His offer of salvation.

"He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."— **1 John 3:8.**

Our Saviour created a way out of our crumbling world by sacrificing His own flesh and blood. And the same Jesus, who will someday cure all the world's ills by destroying sin, offers right now to erase the guilt of sin from your own life. You don't have

these prophecies are being fulfilled before our very eyes; they indicate that Christ's coming back to earth is near at hand.

Let's look at ten signposts of Bible prophecy along the highway to heaven, and examine the questions that a modern-day traveler might ask as he reads them.

SIGNPOST 1—ANGUISH! TERROR! PERPLEXITY!

How would you describe an age that has all the technology to expand human happiness, and yet is plagued by disintegrating families and violent neighborhoods? Over nineteen hundred years ago Jesus gave a prophetic description of contemporary life that sounds as if it could have been taken from the evening news:

"There will be SIGNS in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, NATIONS WILL BE IN ANGUISH AND PERPLEXITY at the roaring and tossing of the sea. MEN WILL FAINT FROM TERROR, APPREHENSIVE OF WHAT IS COMING ON THE WORLD, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. AT THAT TIME THEY WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."—**Luke 21:25-28.**

No more accurate description of today's world, could be penned than: "Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world." A generation exists today which has grown up entirely in the shadow of stockpiled weapons capable of

destroying the entire planet. Today's apprehensions make yesterday's seem pretty small: "What if some terrorist gets ahold of a nuclear warhead?"

But Jesus gives us a basis for hope in a calamitous age. The current crisis of global insecurity—"anguish and perplexity"—only reinforces the truth that Christ's coming really is "drawing near."

People today often moan in frustration, "Look what the world has come to!" But the student of Bible prophecy can exclaim with hopeful voice, "Look WHO is coming to our world."

SIGNPOST 2—WORLD CALAMITIES.

How do natural disasters fit into last day-events?

"There will be great EARTHQUAKES, FAMINES and PESTILENCES in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. When you see these things happening, you know that THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR."— Luke 21:11, 31.

Skeptics might say, "So what? There have always been famines and earthquakes." But think about famines for a moment. Isn't it rather amazing that a world which can send men to the moon, CANNOT feed all its people. How is it that those images of starving kids with distended bellies persist on the news, when many countries grow more food than they know



2. HOW SOON WILL JESUS COME?

Our generation has seen and is seeing these ten great signposts of prophecy fulfilled before our very eyes.

After describing the events that were to characterize the time just preceding His Second Coming, Jesus concludes His remarks by saying,

"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."— Matthew 24:34.

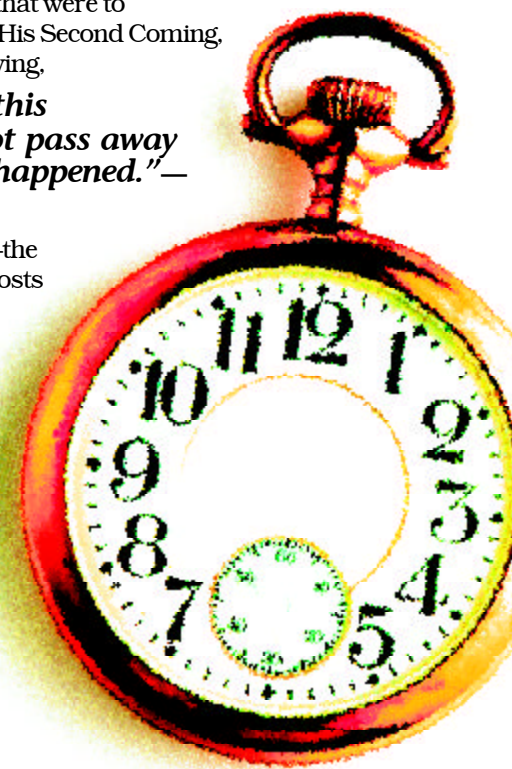
The conclusion is obvious—the generation portrayed by these signposts of prophecy will see Jesus return to earth a second time. It won't be long until He'll sweep away sin and suffering. Jesus will come and establish His everlasting kingdom.

What did Jesus say about the exact time of His coming?

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."— Matthew 24:36.

What important caution has Christ given to us?

"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."—Matthew 24:44.



the gospel would reach the whole world:

“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.

We’ve had great Christian missionary movements in history. But what has happened in the last few years is unprecedented. For decades almost half the globe was locked behind an iron curtain, shut away from the good news. Despotic, atheistic regimes suppressed Christian witness.

But then in 1989 almost overnight it seemed that Eastern Europe slipped from the iron grip of communism. Dictators fled their countries. Secret police forces went into hiding. The Berlin Wall came crashing down. And then, incredibly, the mighty Soviet Empire fell apart and stumbled toward democracy. Suddenly roughly half the planet was opening its arms to the gospel.

We’ve seen a spiritual revolution in the former Soviet Union as the gospel rushed in to fill an enormous spiritual vacuum. The same is true of other parts of the world. For centuries Muslims have closed their minds to the gospel of Christ. Now many Muslims are turning to Christ and are welcoming the hope of His Second Coming.

The gospel is truly going “to the whole world” as never before. With present technology it’s possible right now to transmit a Christian message simultaneously to almost every person in every nation. Simultaneous translation techniques enable individuals to understand the broadcast in their own language. We are living in the very day Jesus spoke of when He declared: “The gospel will be preached in the whole world” and then “the end will come.”

what to do with?

Jesus knew that famines would persist, that selfish human nature, corrupt governments, and armed conflicts would persist—and grow worse toward the end of time. These factors are what have made recent famines so devastating.

But what about earthquakes? Check these statistics on major earthquakes. According to the World Almanac of 1999, century after century of the Christian era there has been a striking increase in major earthquakes. In the 18th century there were at least 6 major earthquakes, in the 19th century at least 7 major earthquakes, and more than 100 major earthquakes in the 20th century. So the evidence grows more dramatic as we get nearer to our present day. These figures confirm Jesus’ prophecy.

And the world hasn’t stopped shaking: Armenia, India, Mexico, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Turkey, Greece, Taiwan . . . and the list goes on and on. These phenomena are reaching a crescendo—“the kingdom of God is near!”

How many earthquakes will there be here and now in our 21st century, and where will they be? Will our 21st century bring hundreds more earthquakes, or the coming of the King of kings?

SIGNPOST 3—ACCUMULATING WEALTH.

What is the meaning of the fact that wealth seems to slip into the hands of fewer and fewer while more and more fall into poverty?

“You have hoarded wealth in the last days.”—James 5:3.

Despite all our economic insights, despite gross national products in the West that boggle the mind, the rich keep getting richer and the poor poorer. In the 90’s we witnessed a veritable orgy of junk

bond dealing and leveraged buyouts as individuals bought and sold corporations like used cars. The result: an incredible mass of “hoarded wealth” for a few, plant closings and layoffs for many. The multi-million dollar fortunes made as a result of a few transactions are another signpost that show us that “the Lord’s coming is near” (verse 8), that the world is rushing toward the Second Coming of Christ.

SIGNPOST 4—CIVIL UNREST.

Why have discontent and unrest among employees risen so dramatically in spite of technological advance and accumulated wealth?

“Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. THE CRIES OF THE HARVESTERS [WORKERS] have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. Be patient and stand firm, because THE LORD’S COMING IS NEAR.”—James 5:4, 8.

After predicting an unparalleled piling up of wealth in our day, James foresaw civil unrest arising from discontented workers. The tension between the “haves” and the “have-not’s” continues to increase. An ominous streak of anarchy lies just below the surface in the great cities of the world. James indicates that such attitudes are another sign that “the Lord’s coming is near.”

SIGNPOST 5—MORAL DECAY.

Why does the moral fiber of society seem to be shredding?

“But mark this: There will be TERRIBLE TIMES IN THE LAST DAYS. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers

knowledge.”—Daniel 12:4.

The eight preceding signs that Christ’s Second Coming is near began to be fulfilled early in the Christian era. These signs have intensified, multiplied, and crescendoed to a climax in our day. Daniel’s prediction is unique in that it refers exclusively to our day, to “the time of the end.”

Daniel here indicates that knowledge of his prophecies would increase in “the time of the end.” But the language used in this prediction also seems to point straight to our computerized information age.

Knowledge of all kinds has increased at lightning speed these past few years. One commentator has stated: “There have been more changes in the past fifty years than in the previous two thousand. We do thousands of things that H.G. Wells and Jules Verne never dreamed of in their most visionary moments.”

“MANY WILL GO HERE AND THERE to increase knowledge.” Before 1850, people moved around by horse and buggy, pretty much as they had from the beginning of time. Now we break the sound barrier and span the globe in everything from Concorde airplanes to space shuttles.

Increased travel and the recent flood of inventions suggests a fulfillment of Daniel 12:4 and gives further evidence that we’re living in “the time of the end.”

SIGNPOST 10—GOSPEL TO ALL THE WORLD.

Jesus predicted that just before His coming

with the knowledge that one push of a button could turn our world into a heap of rubble. No wonder the Bible speaks of God “destroying those who destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18).

We live in a strange world. Everyone agrees that we should give peace a chance. We talk peace; we boast of international organizations dedicated to peace; yet everyone keeps falling into armed conflicts. Pent up hostilities, some centuries old, flare into open conflict. Border disputes turn into artillery exchanges. Terrorist raids result in “surgical air strikes,” and “surgical air strikes” bring on more terrorist raids. The prophets Micah and Joel predicted that at the very time the nations talk about their desire for peace (Micah 4:1-3), distrust for their neighbors compels them to prepare for war (Joel 3:9-13).

Long ago the Bible pictured our present peace-war dilemma, and declared that permanent peace will reign on earth only when Jesus comes.

SIGNPOST 9—MODERN PROGRESS.

Why, after centuries of human history, is mankind suddenly now making such scientific and technological progress? Why has transportation and communication brought the world so close together?

IN “THE TIME OF THE END, many will go here and there to increase

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—having a form of godliness but denying its power. EVIL MEN AND IMPOSTORS WILL GO FROM BAD TO WORSE, deceiving and being deceived.”—
2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13.

Could anyone think of a more accurate description of our world? Point a camera in any direction these days and you'll catch a picture of arrogant materialism. You'll capture a shocking epidemic of child abuse and molestation. You'll get countless scenes of youth out of control, kids in their early teens killing and maiming at random. You'll snap shot after shot showing lovers of pleasure who try to make the cult of self-indulgence seem “healthy and normal.” Our obsession with uninhibited freedom has indeed brought “terrible times in the last days.” All these things form a gallery of pictures loudly proclaiming that Jesus' coming is very near.

SIGNPOST 6—SPREAD OF THE OCCULT.

How is it that in our secular age we've seen an explosion of interest in the occult?”

“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.”—
2 Thessalonians 2:9.

"For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible."—Matthew 24:24.

These passages predict that toward the time of the end, the work of the antichrist will feature all kinds of miracles and signs, a counterfeit manifestation of the supernatural. This picture flatly contradicts what almost all observers have been predicting for hundreds of years, that reason would triumph over superstition. The scientific method, we were told, would win hands-down over mere religious truth. Science would make the supernatural incredible, if not obsolete.

But what have we discovered as we near the twenty-first century? People can cling to their VCRs and their Tarot cards at the same time. Educated, scientific, progressive human beings are as superstitious as ever.

The occult hasn't shriveled away, it's advertising in broad daylight. Paganism is simply an alternative lifestyle. Witches and warlocks appear on talk shows. New Agers are everywhere, selling magical crystals and channeling departed spirits. Counterfeit signs and wonders are booming. All this makes it even clearer that history is moving toward a climax, that just as Jesus predicted, we are living in the time of "the coming of the Son of Man" (verse 27).

SIGNPOST 7—AN AWAKENED WORLD.

What is the meaning of the awakening to world-consciousness of Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the nations of the Far East?

"LET THE NATIONS BE ROUSED; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all

the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe . . . so great is their wickedness!' Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR in the valley of decision."—Joel 3:12-14.

Today Asia and Africa have aroused from sleep; they feel their strength and are looking for their place in the sun, for a piece of a global economy. Eastern Europe is seething. The republics of the former Soviet Union jostle for position. Middle Eastern countries empowered by oil revenues are dramatically enlarging their spheres of influence. As one ethnic or religious group after another reaches for sovereignty, maps are out-of-date almost as soon as they're printed. We are witnessing perhaps the most widespread awakening of individual nations in all of recorded history, "for the day of the Lord is near."

SIGNPOST 8—PEACE PLANS AND WAR PREPARATIONS.

Why do we vacillate between talking about peace and engaging in war?

Jesus said of the last days just before His coming:

"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. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."—Matthew 24:6, 7.

Before the twentieth century, war had never been waged on a truly worldwide scale. But in this century nearly every significant nation on earth joined in two great global conflicts. And since World War II, we've lived