

When Will the Lord Return?

Henceforth is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me on that day: and not to me only, but unto all who love his appearing (2 Timothy 4.8).

Introduction

All who love the Lord Jesus Christ long for His return. The Apostle Paul described the Lord's return for His Church as our "blessed hope" (Titus 2.11-14) and declared that those who love his appearing will receive a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4.8). For Israel, His return will mean the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to the nation and the establishment of His kingdom on earth (Matthew 6.10; Zechariah 14.9), in which the Twelve Apostles will rule Israel's twelve tribes (Matthew 19.28).

Jesus taught that no one knew the day or hour of His return (Matthew 24.36-41; Mark 13.32). Yet He indicated to the Twelve how to recognize the time of His return ((Matthew 24.32-35; Mark 13.24-31). Furthermore, He stated that His return was conditioned upon an action that only the nation of Israel could trigger (Matthew 23.37-39).

To the Apostle Paul, the Lord revealed information about His return which was unknown to the prophets and to the nation of Israel. This return would come in stages for members of the Church, the body of Christ. At this return, members of the body of Christ, dead and alive, will receive resurrection bodies.

This study will examine the return of the Lord and when it will occur.

Historical Considerations

What did the Jews of the Old Testament know of the coming of the Messiah? According to prophecy, they knew He would come to earth to do two things. First, He would establish His kingdom on earth. Hundreds of verses in the Old Testament proclaimed this earthly kingdom. The essential characteristics of this kingdom would be peace and righteousness. Isaiah the prophet succinctly described this kingdom in the following passage:

¹ Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. ³ And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; ⁴ But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. ⁵ Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist. ⁶ And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. ⁷ Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious (Isaiah 11.1-10).

Even a dullard can recognize this has not occurred. Wolves are not resting with lambs or lions grazing like oxen. Christ is not ruling the earth from Jerusalem and nations do not look to Him for leadership. On the contrary, we live in a world in rebellion to Christ and opposition to Him is increasing. In the Apostle Paul's words, we live in a world run by Satan (2 Corinthians 4.3-4).

Two thousand years ago, believing Jews of Jesus day longed for the Messiah to establish His kingdom. An air of expectancy of His coming surrounded these believers. They longed to be released from the domination of pagan Gentile nations and looked for God to fulfill His promises to the nation. It was in that context that the promise of His coming began to be fulfilled. Notice the words of the angel to Mary, when he announced she would have a Son. According to Luke:

³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1.30-33).

This was kingdom language. The throne of David was the foundation for God's earthly rule over Israel (2 Samuel 7). Notice the words Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, spoke under the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1.67) concerning the anticipated birth of the Messiah:

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, ⁶⁹ And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant— ⁷⁰ As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from

of old— ⁷¹ Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² To show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, ⁷³ The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, ⁷⁴ To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, ⁷⁵ In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days (Luke 1.68-75).

These few verses reveal the Jews anticipated the Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom and fulfill His covenantal promises to the nation. The angel and the Holy Spirit confirmed these Old Testament kingdom promises. Indeed, the Lord Himself reiterated the promise of the kingdom with His words:

⁹ Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6.9-10).

Beyond the Kingdom

The second thing the Jews recognized from the Scriptures was that the Messiah would suffer. Rachel, as she was dying in childbirth, wished to call her son Ben-oni (son of my sorrow). But Jacob called him Benjamin (son of the right hand), that is, “son of strength” (Genesis 35.18). The rabbis understood this verse to be Messianic. They saw greater meaning in the verse than a record of two names for the child. But they could not grasp its full significance. They recognized Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 were messianic passages in which the Messiah would suffer, just as they recognized the hundreds of kingdom passages in which the Messiah would reign. Some rabbis thought two Messiahs would come. But no one was able to discern that the Messiah would come in two advents separated by time.

God kept how and when He would come hidden. Within this enigma, He veiled how He would solve the problem of man's sin. The Jews sacrificed untold millions of animals as coverings (כִּפָּרִים) for sin in the priests' daily administration of the Tabernacle and the Temple. They performed these animal sacrifices because God commanded it. They had no idea that animals they sacrificed were shadows of a greater reality, that they were pictures or types of the death of the Messiah who would be sacrificed as mankind's sin-bearer. Indeed, while hundreds of verses spoke of the kingdom, only one passage in the Old Testament spoke of the Messiah's suffering to take away sin. That was Isaiah 53.4-6, 10-12.

⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

¹⁰ But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. ¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

Two Comings Revealed

The Bible is a progressive revelation. God chose not to tell everything at once. He revealed His plan over a span of about 1,500 hundred years. The main effort of God's plan was to defeat Satan, redeem fallen mankind, and establish His kingdom on the earth.

When the Lord came unto His own people (the Jews), His own rejected Him (John 1.11). After He had been crucified and raised from the dead, the foremost matter upon the apostles' minds was the kingdom. This is quite understandable because of the hundreds of verses in the Old Testament which proclaimed this kingdom. But the apostles had a personal stake in the kingdom. The Lord had promised them rulership over Israel's twelve tribes (Matthew 19.28). When they asked Him if it was time for Him to establish His kingdom, He replied, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1.7). He did not tell them no earthly kingdom was coming. Such an answer would have abrogated hundreds of verses about the kingdom in the Old Testament, all of Israel's covenants, the angelic testimony to Mary, the testimony of the Holy Spirit through Zachariah, and the Lord's own words in the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6.9-10). On the contrary, He told them the Father controlled the timing of the kingdom.

Angels in attendance at the Lord's ascension reminded the disciples of Zechariah's prophecy about the Lord's return. We read the following in Acts 1.9-11:

⁹ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. ¹¹ They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from

you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

The angels declared the Lord would return to earth as He had left. Jesus left the earth head first. He will return feet first and His return was described by Zechariah:

¹ Behold, a day is coming for the Lord when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. ² For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. ³ Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle.

⁴ In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. ⁵ You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him (Zechariah 14.1-5)!

The Lord's second advent will occur during the time the prophets described as the Day of the Lord (cf. Zephaniah 1). Jesus referred to this time as the Tribulation (Matthew 24.21). This "day" is the subject of the book of Revelation. At the beginning of his record, the Apostle John declared he was in the Spirit on the Day of the Lord (Revelation 1.10). The events John wrote about in Revelation remain future. They concern the unfulfilled prophecies of Daniel and the events Jesus described in Matthew 24. Everything in the book of Revelation concerns Israel and the nations. Nothing in

Revelation concerns the Church, the body of Christ for it will not be on the earth during the events described in the book. This is why one finds no Church language in Revelation. It is gone. At the end of the Tribulation, the Lord will return to deliver Israel and the remaining members of the human race who have survived the horrific rule of the Beast and God's judgments (Revelation 19.11-19; Matthew 24.21-22).

The Lord's Return According to Hosea 6

The prophet Hosea prophesied against Israel and revealed God's case against the nation (cf. Hosea 4.1-2, 6, 13, 15-19). Most of Hosea's message was about God's judgment that would soon fall upon the nation. But he also wrote prophetically of how God would deal with the nation in the future. In Hosea 5.15-6.3, we have a prophetic outline of Israel's future. Hosea proclaimed,

I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me (Hosea 5.15).

This verse established the start point and timeframe for the first two verses of chapter 6. It foresaw Israel's rejection of their Messiah. After the nation rejected Him and He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven. There He is seated at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110.1) where He will remain until the nation acknowledges its sin and repents (Zechariah 12.10; Matthew 23.37-39; Romans 11.25-27).

Continuing in Hosea chapter 6, the prophet provided information about the timing of the Lord's return. This is one of the most explicit places in the Bible which revealed a large gap of time would occur between His first advent and His return. He proclaimed,

¹ *"Come, let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us, but*

*He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. ²
“He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the
third day, that we may live before Him (Hosea 6.1-2).*

Hosea's prophecy concerns God's faithfulness to Israel. His words, "He has torn us," "He has wounded us," refer to God's judgment upon Israel by Gentile nations as a result of Israel's rebellion. The final fulfillment of the prophecy is the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord. That is when the nation will be most severely torn and wounded. After this, Hosea wrote, "He will heal us," "He will bandage us," and "He will revive us after two days." This refers to the Lord's return and the setting up of His kingdom. Hosea prophesied God would revive Israel "after two days." We know a day in God's timetable consists of 1,000 years according to Peter (2 Peter 3.8). Thus, two days are 2,000 years. The two days refers to the time in which the nation rejected their Messiah until His return.

The final part of the prophecy, "He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him" refers to that time of blessing for national Israel: the Messianic kingdom. Israel will "live" before God. The nation will become the holy nation of priests God intended (Exodus 19.4-6). At that time, God will fulfill the covenants (the Abrahamic, Palestinian, Sabbatic, Davidic, and New) He promised to the nation. The prophecies spoken to Mary by the angel announcing the Messiah's birth will be fulfilled as will the prophecy by Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. This Messianic kingdom will last for 1,000 years as described by Revelation 20.1-10, i.e., Hosea's "third day." Paul revealed the secret (μυστήριον) that the two days (2,000 years) of Hosea 6 will be the time in which the nation has been "blinded" (πώρωσις). It will continue until "the fullness of the Gentiles" (Romans 11.25) is completed. During this time God has been forming the secret entity known as the Church, the body of Christ. After

the Church has reached completion, i.e., the “fullness of the Gentiles,” “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11.26). Hosea’s “third day” can then begin.

Hosea 6: The Three Days of God Towards Israel			
Torn, Wounded	Two Days	2,000 Years	Blinding of Israel (Romans 11.25) and creation of the body of Christ
Healed, Bandaged, Revived, Raised	Third Day	1,000 Years (Kingdom)	All Israel Saved (Romans 11.26)

The Lord’s Return and the Apostle Paul

God revealed to Paul many secrets He had kept hidden from the prophets as well as the Twelve. One of these “secrets” ([μυστήριον](#)) Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 15.51:

ἰδοὺ μυστήριον ὑμῖν λέγω: πάντες οὐ κοιμηθησόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα
Behold, I tell you a secret; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,

Paul wrote, “Look! I am telling you a secret.” What was the secret? “We will not all sleep (die) but we will all be changed.” Let the reader understand that this verse revealed a NEW doctrine. No one had heard of it before. That is what a secret is—something no one knew. The prophets knew nothing of it. The Twelve knew nothing of it. The ascended Lord revealed it to Paul. The secret was that one generation of believers will not experience physical death (sleep). Instead, in a moment ([ἄτομος](#)), in the twinkling of an eye ([ῥιπή](#) ὀφθαλμοῦ), some believers mortal bodies will be transformed into heavenly (resurrection) bodies.

When will this metamorphosis occur? Paul taught the Thessalonians about this event:

¹³ *But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.* ¹⁴ *For if we believe that Jesus died*

and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18).

Paul comforted the Thessalonians with the hope of resurrection for those believers who had died. He went on to describe the order of resurrection. His language in verse 15, “for this we say to you by the word of the Lord” meant that his communication was knowledge he had received directly from the risen Lord. It was a secret. But Paul could now reveal it. Paul declared the following order of events:

1.	The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God (v. 16).
2.	The dead in Christ will rise first (v. 16).
3.	Believers alive upon the earth will follow next by being “caught up” (ἄρπάζω) i.e., snatched away (vv. 15, 17).
4.	Both groups will meet the Lord in the air (v. 17).

This great truth has a practical result in our daily walk with Christ. We are to proclaim it to one another as a source of hope and comfort (v. 18). The hope of comfort of this great doctrine is threefold:

1. Members of the Church, the body of Christ, look forward to a resurrection body.
2. One generation of believers will not experience physical death.

3. The Church, the body of Christ, will not experience the horrors of the Tribulation.

With regard to the last point, we KNOW no member of the body of Christ will experience the trials of the Tribulation because Paul explicitly stated this truth to the Thessalonians:

⁸ For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1.8-10).

⁸ But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing (1 Thessalonians 5.8-11).

These two passages unreservedly declare members of the Church will not experience God's wrath which He will pour out upon the earth in those seven terrible years. The wrath Paul wrote about was not hell for the believer is safe from that judgment the moment he believes the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). The wrath Paul wrote of was the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord.

This fact is confirmed by Paul's follow-up letter to the

Thessalonians. Paul declared:

¹ Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things (2 Thessalonians 2.1-5)?

Apparently, some first-century mid- or post-tribulationist had sent the Thessalonians a forged Pauline letter stating the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, had come. Paul corrected this error and reminded the Thessalonians that he had already taught them the Rapture would occur before the Day of the Lord.¹ This one passage should settle all mid- or post-tribulationist teaching in the Church today. But if that is not enough, Paul made this point not only to the Thessalonians but to the Romans, the Ephesians, and to the Colossians (Romans 5.9; Ephesians 5.6; Colossians 3.6). No place exists for such a view for those who believe the Bible. It was deception in Paul's day as it is today. It contradicts Paul's explicit teaching.

Tragically, the vast majority in Christendom refuse to acknowledge the great truth of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture. They have chosen not to believe God and to disobey Paul's command to comfort one another with this truth. Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote a parody of the hymn *Is it the Crowning Day?*

to drive home this point to those who reject God's Word about this great truth. The traditional words to the hymn are:

Jesus may come today, Glad day! Glad day!
 And I would see my friend; Dangers and troubles would end
 If Jesus should come today.
 Glad day! Glad day! Is it the crowning day?
 I'll live for today, nor anxious be,
 Jesus, my Lord, I soon shall see;
 Glad day! Glad day! Is it the crowning day?

Barnhouse's version of the hymn for those who reject the Rapture was:

Jesus can't come today, Sad day! Sad day!
 And I won't see my friend; Dangers and troubles won't end,
 Because Jesus can't come today.
 Sad day! Sad day! Today is not the crowning day?
 I won't live for today, and anxious I'll be,
 The Beast and the False Prophet I soon shall see,
 Sad day! Sad day! Today is not the crowning day?

We may smile at Barnhouse's taunt but make no mistake; God is not pleased with unbelief. Unbelief is the GREAT sin (Hebrews 11.6).

The Advents of Christ Summarized

A D V E N T	First Advent (Rejection and Suffering)	
	Second Advent (Mercy and Judgment)	
	Phase 1: Revealed only by Paul	Phase 2: Revealed in Old Testament
	The Lord returns for His Body, the Church to save it from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1.10, 4.13-18, 5.9; 1 Corinthians 15.51-52).	God pours out wrath on a Christ-rejecting world and returns as King to save a repentant Israel (Matthew 24.21-22, 29-31; Revelation 19; Psalm 2.4-5, 12).

In His first advent, Jesus preached the gospel of repentance and offered the prophesied kingdom to Israel (Matthew 4.17). Peter continued this offer after the Lord's resurrection (Acts 2-3). Instead of pouring out His wrath at that time due to the nation's rejection of the Messiah (the next event according to prophetic revelation, cf. Psalm 2; Zephaniah 1), God in His mercy, gave Paul the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 24.20; Romans 2.16) and commissioned him as the apostle of the Gentiles.

When Will Christ Return?

We have examined several passages which describe the Lord's advents. The Old Testament believers knew of only one advent. After the Lord rose from the dead the Twelve recognized that the Lord would come again: two advents. But the ascended, glorified Lord revealed to Paul that He would come again, not to the earth as Zechariah had prophesied, but in the air, before His return to earth. In that return, members of the Church, the body of Christ,² would meet Him in the air. Thus, the Lord's Second Advent will be composed of two parts: Christ will come first for His Church, the body of Christ, and second, Christ will come to deliver Israel and Gentiles who have survived the Tribulation.

As to when this will occur, the Lord can return for His body at any time. While that is so, it makes sense that His return will correspond roughly with His other return. Israel is God's timepiece and once the Church is gone, God's prophetic promises related to the nation will again begin to be fulfilled. Below is an overall chart of God's plan for the ages.

Timeline of God's Plan From Adam to Eternity				
Adam to Abraham	Abraham to Christ	Paul to Fullness	Messiah Reigns	Eternity

Mankind	Israel	Church	Kingdom	New Heavens and Earth
4,000-2,000	2,000-0	0-2,000	2,000-3,000	∞
Day 1-2	Day 3-4	Day 5-6	Day 7	Day 8
Six Days of Work . . .			Sabbath Rest	New Beginnings

Any statement about the timing of the Lord's return is speculative. However, as we have examined above, Hosea's prophecy provides a guideline for the Lord's return. In His earthly ministry, the Lord provided signs as indicators for the time of His return (Matthew 24). We also know the Lord's return is near by the fact that Israel has been reestablished as a nation in the land of promise. When the Jews recaptured Jerusalem in 1967, they regained control of their city they had lost 2,000 years ago to Titus' legions in 70 A.D. We know from Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezekiel 37) and many other prophecies (e.g., Deuteronomy 30.1-4) that God promised to restore the Jews to the land. In 1948, with the reestablishment of Israel as a nation, God began to set the stage for that reality. These factors lead to the conclusion the Lord's return is near.

The time that has passed since the Lord's crucifixion has been about 2,000 years. From the chart above we note that God generally works in 1,000-2,000 year increments. God dealt with all of mankind for 2,000 years before He chose Abraham. He then dealt with the nation of Israel for 2,000 years. After that, He called Paul to be the Apostle of the Gentiles to found the Church. For the past 2,000 years, God has been calling out Jews and Gentiles into the Church, the body of Christ. It is logical that the time of the fullness of the Gentiles (Romans 11.25) is drawing close, especially in light of Hosea's prophecy of the two days. When the Church, the body of Christ, is complete, God will remove it by the Rapture. God will resume His program with Israel to complete the last week of Daniel's 70-week prophecy. Paul taught these truths in his

illustration of the Olive Tree in Romans 11.

The timetable of Hosea is confirmed further by John's Gospel. John 11 is the account of Lazarus' death. Lazarus represented the Jewish nation beginning with Abraham. John wrote that Lazarus was in the tomb four days (John 11.17, 39). Peter declared a day with the Lord is 1,000 years (2 Peter 3.8). The Jewish people have been sick or dead spiritually for 4,000 years (from 2,000 B.C. to now). John wrote that upon hearing of Lazarus' sickness Jesus delayed going to him for two days (John 11.6). This delay symbolically constituted 2,000 years (from Abraham to Jesus' First Advent). Jesus then told His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep" (John 11.11). After Jesus arrived He called Lazarus from the grave (John 11.43). Lazarus' resurrection was a picture of the birth of the Jewish people to life when the Messiah returns (Ezekiel 37.1-14; Romans 11.26). The first two days represented Israel's sickness. After two days Jesus came to revive Lazarus. These two days of delay represented the time from Abraham to Christ and constituted the hope of Israel's repentance. Lazarus' being in the grave for four days were prophetic of the time from Abraham to Israel's repentance. When the Lord returns He will revive the nation from death and fulfill Ezekiel's prophecy. Israel is sick and dead apart from her Messiah. It has been 4,000 years since Abraham. It has been 2,000 years since Jesus came to Israel. Given Peter's accounting, the Lord's delay is almost over. His return is near.

Lazarus' Sickness and Death a Picture of Israel Until They Repent			
"Sick" from Abraham to Christ's Advent	2,000 years	Lazarus "sick"	2 days
"Dead" from Abraham and Christ's rejection to His return	4,000 years	Lazarus "dead"	4 days

Speculative Dating for the Lord's Returns

The initial assumption is events of the 2nd advent will roughly parallel events of the 1st advent. The Lord grew up and began His ministry when He was about 30 and ministered for 3 years. He was crucified about 30 A.D. After He arose from the dead, God gave the nation another opportunity to repent and accept Him as King and establish His kingdom. This was the subject of Peter's two sermons in Acts 2-3.³ The crisis point for the nation after Christ's resurrection occurred at the Sanhedrin's stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. In Acts 9, Luke recorded the salvation of Saul of Tarsus, whom God commissioned the Apostle of the Gentiles. Paul's ministry was primarily to Gentiles but three times in Acts Luke recorded his going to the Jews. Each of these ventures ended with Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 13, 18, 28). In 70 A.D., the Romans destroyed the Temple, Jerusalem, and dispersed the nation. That event occurred 40 years after the crucifixion. Forty is frequently a period of time in which God exercises testing. The Jews had 40 years to change their mind about Jesus the Messiah. They failed. Thus, we can conclude the terminal date for God's dealings with national Israel was 70 A.D.

If we start at 70 A.D. and move forward 2,000 years (2 days in Hosea's prophecy) we arrive at 2070 A.D. According to Hosea's timetable, we can reasonably speculate the Lord will return by then. But before this return, the Rapture, the Antichrist, and the 7 year Tribulation must take place.

If we postulate another 40 year time of testing for Israel and count back from 2070, we arrive at 2030. This would seem to be a reasonable date for the Rapture. The 40 years of testing would allow 30-33 years for Satan to prepare his man. Satan always counterfeits God and it is a reasonable assumption he will imitate the Lord Jesus' earthly life with his counterfeit Christ. Jesus repeatedly warned about deception in Matthew 24.

If a whole generation lives with no Christians on earth (removed by the Rapture) almost all true spiritual witness will have vanished. Under such conditions, Satanic deception will encounter little resistance (cf. 2 Corinthians 4.4) and this will allow the Antichrist to emerge for the final 7 years. The chart below outlines a possible timetable.

The Rapture (Return of Christ for His Body)	2030 A.D.
Deception and Emergence of Antichrist	2030-2063 A.D.
7 Year Tribulation (Judgment of God)	2063-2070 A.D.
Return of Christ for Israel and the Nations	2070 A.D.

Paul divided the human race into Jew, Gentile, and the Church (1 Corinthians 10.32). In the first phase of Jesus' return (the Rapture) He comes for the Church, the body of Christ. In the second phase, He comes for the Jewish and Gentile world. The dating above is speculative. Whatever its merit, the body of Christ is nearing completion and our blessed hope draws nigh (Titus 2.13). The clock reads 11:59. For this reason, with this hope, we should live lives honoring to the Lord, redeeming the time (Romans 13.12).

¹ The English word "rapture" does not occur in our English Bibles. The word comes from the Vulgate by way of St. Jerome (c. 347-420). In revising the Latin New Testament from the Greek New Testament, he translated the Greek word [ἀρπάζω](#) ("snatch away," 1 Thessalonians 4.17) into the Latin "[rapiemur](#)." The Latin verb form "[rapio](#)" means to be "caught up" or "taken away." From these Latin words derive our English word "rapture."

² Contrary to tradition and popular belief, Paul wrote the Church, the body of Christ, began with him (Acts 9.1-22; 1 Corinthians 3.10-11; 1 Timothy 1.12-17). See the article, [Paul: Chief of Sinners?](#) The Church did not begin in Jesus' earthly ministry, with the Twelve, or on the Day of Pentecost (the traditional "birthday of the Church"). God commissioned Paul as Apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13) about 37 A.D.

From Paul alone do we learn about the Church, the body of Christ, in which Jew and Gentile are equal in Christ (Ephesians 2.11-22; 3.3-9; Colossians 1.24-27; 1 Corinthians 12.12-13; Galatians 3.26-28, and Romans 16.25-27). The Twelve knew nothing of this great doctrine until they learned it from Paul. This is why we find no mention of the body of Christ in the writings of Peter, James, John, and Jude or about equality of Jew and Gentile in Christ. The Twelve ministered to Israel (Galatians 2.7-9) and wrote to Jewish believers (1 Peter 1.1; James 1.1; Revelation 2-3). Paul declared the Church was a “secret” ([μυστήριον](#)). If it was secret before Paul, the Twelve obviously could not have known about it.

³ The primary purpose of Luke’s writing Acts was to explain the fall of Israel, not to record the birth of the Church. See my article, [The Purpose of the Book of Acts](#).

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