

Will Jesus Return?

By Rex Morgan

Most people are aware that Christmas is associated with the birth of Jesus Christ in Palestine just over 2000 years ago.

Interestingly, it is impossible to prove Jesus was born on December 25th. No one knows for sure the actual day or month of his birth, or even the year for that matter.

But there is plenty of evidence that he did in fact live. He is mentioned by several Jewish and Roman historians and writers of the first two centuries after his birth.¹

Since his departure there have been regular rumours that Jesus is about to return. Before the end of the first century, various Christian leaders predicted this would happen suddenly and soon.

A litany of failed predictions

In the second century, prophets of the Montanist movement predicted that Jesus would return sometime during their lifetime and establish the New Jerusalem in the city of Pepuza in Asia Minor. In AD 365 a bishop named Hilary of Poitiers announced that the world would end that year.

What a woeful series of false alarms, unfulfilled expectations, broken hopes and dreams! But does the fact that so many miscalculations have been made mean that Jesus won't return? Is the whole idea of his return a colossal hoax?

As AD 1000 approached, many Christians in Europe predicted the return of Jesus and the end of the

world on the first of January. An army of pilgrims sold their belongings and trekked to Jerusalem to await Christ. Later, during the great plague of 1348-1352, prophets said the end was at hand and Christ would appear within ten years.

Reformist Hans Hut rounded up 144,000 "elect saints" to prepare for Jesus' return in 1528. The famous explorer Christopher Columbus wrote "The Book of Prophecies" around the year 1500, including a prediction that the end of the world would occur in 1658.

One of the more bizarre "false alarms" occurred at Leeds in 1806. A hen laid eggs bearing the words "Christ is coming". Many visited the spot and "found religion". Then someone discovered that the ink-inscribed eggs had been forced up into the chicken's body!

John Wesley said the end would come in 1836. A New York farmer,

Peace On Earth — When?

At the birth of Jesus Christ, a group of angels sang the immortal words, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill towards all men" (Luke 2:14). This mantra is often quoted around the Christmas season. According to the *Santa's Warehouse* website: "People decorate their homes and give gifts each year at Christmas time to celebrate 'peace on earth and goodwill towards all men'".

But no matter how hard we try, we don't seem even to be able to achieve peace in many of our families and neighbourhoods, let alone on global scale! And this gloomy situation prevails even though Jesus has come and gone. Where is the "peace on earth" the angels promised at his coming?



A study of the Bible as a whole reveals that Jesus didn't come -- the first time -- to bring peace. In fact, he promised the very opposite would occur. Although it isn't as well known as the "peace on earth and goodwill to men" citation, Jesus said "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34)

Interesting words indeed to be voiced by someone known as "the Prince of Peace"! The Bible shows that the reason for Christ's first coming was not to set up his world-ruling Kingdom. If he had been attempting to establish world peace at that time, he has certainly been a failure!

However, the good news is that Christ is going to come *again*, and this time the mission *will* be to bring peace on earth.

Along with numerous other Bible promises, the angelic refrain "peace on earth and good will towards men" is a prophetic pronouncement that won't be fulfilled until Jesus' second coming.

Flags of the nations displayed at the United Nations office in Geneva, Switzerland. The United Nations organisation was founded in 1945, right after World War II, in an international effort to achieve world peace. The founders envisaged that the organisation would act to prevent conflicts between nations and make future wars impossible. However, although the body is subscribed to by 192 member states, including nearly every recognised independent state in the world, there are still several dozen ongoing conflicts that continue to rage around the globe. Sadly, the words penned almost 3,000 years ago by the Bible prophet Isaiah and quoted a millennium later by the apostle Paul to describe the nature of mankind have demonstrated their truth throughout the centuries and are still valid today: "And the way of peace have they not known" (Isaiah 59:8; Romans 3:17).



Photo © Rex Morgan 2008

FLAGS OF THE NATIONS

William Miller proclaimed Jesus would return on March 21, 1843, based on his study of Old Testament prophecies. When this didn't happen he predicted a new date of October 22, 1844, and hundreds of followers sold their property and possessions and gathered to meet Jesus. His failure to arrive that evening became known as "The Great Disappointment".

After 14 years studying Bible prophecy, Edgar Whisenant, a former NASA engineer, announced the return would be on September 12, 1988. He published a book entitled "88 Reasons why the Rapture could be in 1988", which sold 4 million copies.

Later, a Korean prophet encouraged 20,000 Christians to leave school or quit jobs and await the end, which he believed would be at midnight on October 20 or 28, 1992.

More recently, Mark Biltz, Pastor of El Shaddai Ministries, predicted September 30, 2008 as the potential day of the second coming of Jesus, based on the timing of four lunar eclipses.

What a woeful series of false alarms, unfulfilled expectations, broken hopes and dreams! And the examples listed above are only a small selection of the dates that have been set and failed.

But does the fact that so many miscalculations have been made mean that Jesus won't return? Is the whole idea of his return a colossal hoax?

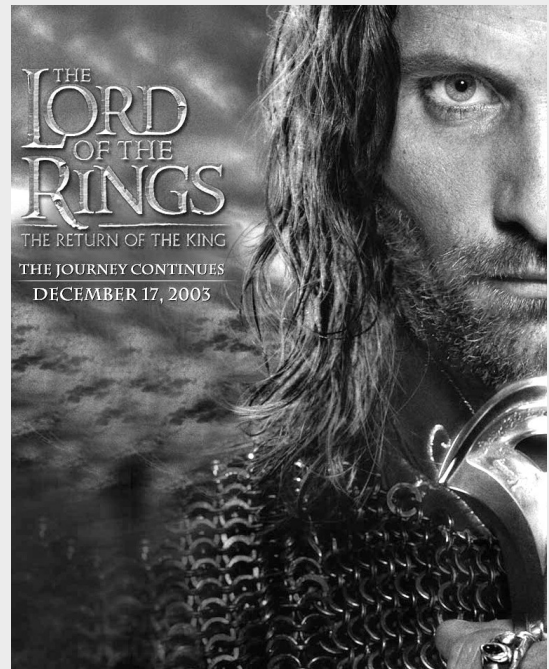
What did Jesus say?

The only authoritative way to answer that is to look at what Jesus himself said in the Bible. When you look at the scriptures, you quickly find that the Bible doesn't support any of the failed dates mentioned above. In fact, to the contrary, the Bible clearly states that no one knows the date of Christ's return.² That is one statement which has certainly proved to be accurate! It is instructive to note that all of the so-called "prophets" who have tried to

The RETURN of the KING

The 2003 fantasy film *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, directed by Peter Jackson, was one of the

most critically acclaimed films and greatest box-office successes of all time. It won all eleven Academy Awards for which it was nominated, putting it in a tie with *Titanic* and *Ben-Hur* for the most Academy Awards ever won. It also won the Academy Award for Best Picture, the only time in history a fantasy film has achieved this.



Although the movie didn't focus at all on this aspect, it is interesting to note that J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the epic book on

which the movie was based, was a Christian, and Christian themes often play in the background of his writings about Middle Earth. There are certainly spiritual parallels to be noted in *The Return of the King*. The most significant of these is that Jesus Christ, who came to earth 2000 years ago, has promised to return as a conquering King.

The first time Jesus came as a meek "lamb to be slaughtered". But his second coming will be in spectacular style. The apocalyptic language of the biblical book of Revelation portrays him as thundering across the heavens on a white horse accompanied by a dazzling army of angels, with special effects that will make Peter Jackson's work seem like a kindergarten play.

It is then that Christ will take up his rightful place of reigning over the world as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". Christians look forward eagerly to this time when the troubles of the world will be put to rest at last and the world will be at peace.

set a date for the second coming were flying in the face of what the Bible itself says!

But again, does the failure of these numerous predictions mean Jesus is not actually going to return? When you look at what the Bible states in that regard, you find the answer is clearly "no". Indeed, the scriptures insist that he *is* going to return, but that nobody knows when it will be.

Forty days after he was crucified

and resurrected, Jesus was taken up into a cloudy sky, with his disciples looking on, incredulous. As they stood there in amazement, two angels declared that "this same Jesus will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven".³

This is one of many clear predictions in the Bible that Jesus will return, although it nowhere reveals *when* he will come back. It does however give some hints,

“And he shall reign...”

Handel's *Messiah* is a majestic work often performed at Christmas time. The completion of the score of this great oratorio in just 24 days is considered to be one of the most incredible achievements in the entire history of music.

One of the most well-known and beloved sections of the work is the *Hallelujah* chorus. Many people recognise the music and can even quote some of the lyrics. “And he shall reign for ever and ever...”



The *Messiah*'s libretto is taken from Bible passages referring to two separate appearances of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, on the earth. Some of the arias, such as *Behold, a virgin shall conceive*, relate to Jesus' first coming. Others, including *The trumpet shall sound*, point to events that have not yet happened, but will take place at the Messiah's future return.

At the London premiere of the *Messiah* in 1743, King George II was reputedly so moved by the magnificence of the masterpiece that he spontaneously rose to his feet during the singing of the *Hallelujah* chorus, capped off by the powerful words “...and he shall reign for ever and ever!” The entire audience, naturally, followed suit. Ever since that day, it has been customary for the audience to stand whenever the “Hallelujah Chorus” is sung.

These words certainly don't apply to any human king or government. None of us lives forever! And sadly, humanity's governments have left a woeful trail of mismanagement and corruption down through the centuries. But a government is coming that is foreshadowed by the words and sentiments of the *Hallelujah* chorus. Jesus Christ, at his second coming, is the one who “shall reign for ever and ever”.

First Presbyterian Church choir in Northville, Michigan USA singing Handel's "Messiah", photo ©Tricia Tompson

some indications of what the world will be like prior to the second coming. Bible prophecies proclaim that it will happen at a time when hatred, crime and violence will be rampant. There will be a series of droughts, disease epidemics and earthquakes, and a great time of world trouble. The world will be at war.⁴

Conditions like this have often occurred throughout history, which helps explain why so many false alarms have been sounded. But such conditions are certainly in evidence today, so it would be foolish to ignore the possibility that Jesus could return in our lifetime.

What will it be like?

Is the return of Jesus something we should look forward to? What will it be like?

The first time he came, much to the dismay of his followers, Jesus didn't make any attempt to overthrow the government of the day. His Jewish compatriots were smarting under the heel of the Roman Empire, but he didn't seek to redress that. He simply carried out a modest and unpretentious teaching operation, in a very localised region of the world. When he was apprehended by the Jewish and Roman authorities and falsely accused of blasphemy and sedition, he didn't speak up strongly in his own defence, or rally his supporters for a rebellion. Instead, he meekly allowed himself to be brutally beaten, humiliated and crucified, without any resistance.

But according to the Bible, the next time Christ comes will be

astounding in its contrast. The symbolic language of the book of Revelation pictures him making a dramatic entrance, shining brilliantly astride a stunning white stallion romping across the heavens with an entourage of dazzling angels, so that no one on earth can miss his arrival.⁵

Hundreds of Bible predictions provide descriptions of this momentous event. They explain it will bring an end to war, using the poetic image of swords being beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.⁶ Then will follow an unprecedented time of global prosperity, with health, education, security, justice and international harmony achieving heights of excellence never attained before.⁷

For thousands of years mankind has dreamt of world peace and happiness for all, but this has consistently eluded us. There has hardly been a single decade in all of history when there hasn't been a war going on somewhere. The scourges of drought, crime, drugs, corruption and poverty have devastated nations and shattered millions of lives. Mankind seems powerless to bring a halt to the unremitting advance of these serious ills.

In order to achieve lasting peace and prosperity for everybody on

planet Earth, it is clear that we need help from beyond ourselves. Thankfully, there is a source of such help. Jesus has promised to return to Earth and deliver a new administration of love, joy and peace. We don't know when it will happen, but for the sake of humanity and the planet we have so greedily abused and ill-treated, it can't happen soon enough!

References:

1. For detailed evidence of Jesus' life on earth, please write for a copy of our article *Jesus Christ – Superstar or Superstition?*

2. Matthew 24:36, 42
3. Acts 1:11
4. Matthew 24:7, 21
5. Revelation 19:11-16
6. Isaiah 2:4
7. Isaiah 9:7

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A “New World Order”

The long-running war in Iraq began with the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein in August 1990. After annexing Kuwait, Saddam's 120,000 troops and 850 tanks rolled on south to threaten Saudi Arabia.

US President George Bush Snr urgently gathered a coalition of allies to send troops to block Saddam's path. In September 1990, President Bush addressed Congress:

“A new partnership of nations has begun, and we stand today at a unique and extraordinary moment. The crisis in the Persian Gulf, as grave as it is, also offers a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times new world order can emerge: a new era—freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, east and west, north and south, can prosper and live in harmony.

“A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavour, and today that new world is struggling to be born. A world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle.”

Unfortunately this bold dream has not been realised. Twenty years later, far from bringing a new era of world peace, in fact the same Persian Gulf War is still being fought! So much for the visionary dreams of mankind's leaders. All the way through our troubled and turbulent history, the promised land of humanity's dreams has remained but a taunting mirage.

But there is yet real hope for a new world order of justice and peace for all. Mankind has shown that despite all of our good intentions, we just aren't capable of bringing about utopia, or anything remotely approaching it. But God, the one who created us, does have the power to do it. And he has given us his word in the Bible that things are going to change. Jesus Christ is going to come back and wage the final war to end all wars, the famous “battle of Armageddon”. Then he will establish a “new world order” that will more than fulfil the greatest aspirations of all mankind.

