

The Advents of Christ

Christ's Timing

Selected Texts

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Christ's Timing

Scripture

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent in 2020.

“Advent” (from the Latin *adventus*) means “coming,” and it refers to the season immediately before Christmas.¹

The “first advent” looks back to Christ’s first coming. The “second advent” looks forward to Christ’s second coming. We live between these two advents.

This year I am exploring the advents of Christ in a sermon series I am calling “The Advents of Christ.”

Last time, I examined “Christ’s Entrance.” His first advent was prophesied, and he came almost 2,000 years ago (Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Isaiah 7:14). His second advent is also prophesied, and he will come at some time in the future (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Today, I would like to look at “Christ’s Timing.” His first advent was at a time predicted (Daniel 9:25). His second advent will be at a time that is unknown (Matthew 24:36).

Next week, I would like to explore “Christ’s Appearance.” When he came the first time, he came as a man (Philippians 2:5-8). And when he comes the second time, he will come as God (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

On Christmas Eve, I would like to look at “Christ’s Arrival.” His first advent was announced (Luke 2:10-14). When he comes the second time, he will come unannounced, as a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

And finally, on the Sunday after Christmas Day, I would like to examine “Christ’s Purpose.” Christ’s first advent was to save the lost (Luke 19:10). His second advent, however, will be to judge

¹ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20–21.

the lost (Matthew 25:31-33, 41-46).

As we consider the advents of Christ, today we are going to examine the timing of Christ's advent. In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul uses the following expression in Galatians 4:4 regarding the timing of Christ's first advent, "But when the fullness of time had come." The note to this verse in *The Reformation Study Bible* states that this is "The time set by the Father...when the promises of God are realized in Christ."²

Let us read Galatians 4:4-5:

⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5)

Introduction

The September 11 attacks, often referred to as 9/11, were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda against the United States on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Terrorists hijacked four airplanes and they crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and each of the two Twin Towers in New York City. The attacks resulted in 2,977 deaths, more than 25,000 injuries, substantial long-term health consequences, and at least \$10 billion in infrastructure and property damage. 9/11 remains the single deadliest terrorist attack in history and the single deadliest incident for fire firefighters and law enforcement officers in the history of the United States, with 343 firefighters and 72 officers killed, respectively.

Emotions for those who were around at that time ranged all over the place. The sense of invulnerability for United States was shattered. Even the two World Wars of the previous century had

² R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 2080.

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mostly taken place away from our precious land. Now, however, many realized that we did indeed live in a fallen world and that we needed to be prepared for the unexpected.

Others took 9/11 a step further. They believed that 9/11 was the beginning of the end of the world. Their fear was solidified by a prediction that circulated on the internet even before the dust had settled after the collapse of the Twin Towers. It was said to be written by Nostradamus in 1654. Here is what he prophesied:

In the City of God there will be a great thunder,
Two brothers torn apart by Chaos,
while the fortress endures,
the great leader will succumb,
The third big war will begin when the big city is burning.

Michel de Nostredame (1503-1566), whose Latinized name is Nostradamus, was a French astrologer, physician, and reputed seer, who is best known for his book titled, *The Prophecies*, a collection of 942 poetic quatrains allegedly predicting future events. The book was first published in 1555. Over the centuries, Nostradamus has attracted many supporters, who, along with much of the popular press, credit him with having accurately predicted many major world events, such as the collapse of the Twin Towers.

However, Nostradamus did not have any genuine, supernatural prophetic ability. His prophecies are generally vague, meaning that they could be applied to virtually anything. Moreover, his prophecies have often been mistranslated, and sometimes deliberately mistranslated. In addition, there are sometimes fraudulent attributions to Nostradamus, such as the Twin Towers prophecy. Perhaps you noticed that I said that Nostradamus died in 1566 and the Twin Towers prophecy was supposedly penned by him in 1654, which is 88 years after his death! The Twin Towers prophecy was actually written by a university student in 1997 in his web-published essay on Nostradamus as an example of how to write an

important-sounding prophecy through the use of vague imagery.³

Nostradamus may have wide, popular appeal in culture. However, his prophecies are about as accurate as my prediction that in the coming decade the mainland of the United States is going to experience a major hurricane that will cause millions of dollars in damages.

On the other hand, every single prophecy related to the first advent of Christ was fulfilled with startling accuracy. These prophecies related to the place of his birth, his hometown, his rejection, his crucifixion, and so much more. Josh Mc Dowell, in his *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, asserts, “Canon Liddon is authority for the statement that there are in the Old Testament 332 distinct predictions which were literally fulfilled in Christ.”⁴

Today, however, I would like to focus our attention on the timing regarding Christ’s first and second advents.

Lesson

In today’s lesson, we learn about Christ’s timing for his first and second advents.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Christ’s Timing for His First Advent
2. Christ’s Timing for His Second Advent

I. Christ’s Timing for His First Advent

First, let’s look at Christ’s timing for his first advent.

Let me give a brief historical background. In 605 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and carried vast numbers of its citizens into captivity. Among those taken into exile was a

³ See https://www.quatrocantos.com/lendas/imlendas/nostradamus_imag/neil_marshall.htm.

⁴ Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017).

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young fourteen-year old teenager named Daniel. Sixty-eight years later, in 537 BC, Daniel was now eighty-two years old when he wrote in Daniel 9:1-2, “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.” Daniel could look back over sixty-eight years of faithful service to God in a culture that was completely hostile to his covenant God. In all his years, with just a handful of others, he had stood alone for God and not compromised on any occasion to be unfaithful to God.

As Daniel read his Bible, not like the Bible that we have but in biblical scrolls, he read in the Prophet Jeremiah something that caught his attention. There, right before his eyes, he read, “This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years” (Jeremiah 25:11). It was true that the Babylonian Empire had been taken over by the Medo-Persian Empire, but that was still over the territory that had once been Babylon. Daniel had lived in captivity for sixty-eight years. According to what he was reading, the duration of the exile would last only two more years!

Daniel’s excitement must have grown. *What else did God have to say about the exile of his people?*, he wondered. So, he kept reading. And soon he came to these words, “For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place [that is, Jerusalem]. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all

the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

There it was again! Right before his eyes was the promise that the exile would end after seventy years. If God’s people turned to God, God would restore them to their Promised Land!

Can you imagine what was going on in Daniel’s heart and mind? Sixty-eight years earlier, as a fourteen-year old teenager, he and thousands of others left the city of their birth. He had never lost his desire to return to Jerusalem. In fact, for sixty-eight years, he had prayed towards Jerusalem, with his windows open. (And that had landed him in huge trouble earlier in his life. But God had marvelously intervened.)

Daniel immediately set out to act on God’s promise. He did not say to himself, as some might say, “Well, God has promised that his people will return, and there is nothing that I can do, or not do, that will make it happen.” No. Daniel thought something like this, “God has promised that after seventy years we will go home. That is his divine promise. I will therefore pray and seek God with all my heart so that he will fulfill his promise.”

Friends, keep in mind that God’s promises move God’s people to action and not to inaction.

Daniel then prayed one of the great prayers that is recorded for us in the Bible. In Daniel 9:3-19, Daniel pleaded with God for forgiveness on behalf of the people of God. He appealed to the great name of God and his covenant faithfulness in petitioning that he would returned the exiles to Jerusalem.

Amazingly, while Daniel was still praying, God’s messenger, Gabriel, responded swiftly, personally, and lovingly to Daniel’s confession and petition (9:20-23). Gabriel said to Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27:

²⁴ “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to

sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. ²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. ²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

Commentator Dale Ralph Davis writes in his commentary on this passage:

In a “Peanuts” cartoon Linus is interpreting a nursery rhyme. He tells Charlie Brown, “The way I see it, ‘the cow jumped over the moon’ indicates a rise in farm prices.” Linus asks if Charlie agrees. Charlie confesses, “I can’t say; I don’t pretend to be a student of prophetic literature.” We may be ready to disqualify ourselves in a similar way as we face Daniel’s *seventy weeks* revelation. I well recall the first time I had to lecture on this passage in a liberal arts college. I worked through the Hebrew text and spent hours reading secondary sources—and almost came to a Charlie Brown position. But at least I had a title for my lecture: “Seventy weeks and twenty problems.”⁵

I don’t have time today to go into a detailed analysis of the **“seventy weeks.”** The start of the **“seventy weeks”** is most likely

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel: His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013), 128.

the decree of Artaxerxes in 444 BC, authorizing Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-8). According to the notes in the *CSB Study Bible*, “There will be a period of **seven weeks** of years (forty-nine years) followed by **sixty-two weeks** of years (434 years), making a total of sixty-nine weeks of years or 483 years from the decree until the coming of **an anointed one, a prince**. The starting point of the prophecy would have begun on Nisan 1 (March 5), 444 BC, followed by sixty-nine weeks of 360-day biblical/prophetic years or 173,880 days, and culminated on Nisan 10 (March 30), 33 AD, the date of Jesus the Messiah’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:28–40).”⁶

I think it is possible—even likely—that because Daniel was so prominent in the early days of the Medo-Persian Empire, his writings were placed in the libraries of Persia. Centuries later, scholars were doing research in the basement of one of those libraries. It was about 4 BC and they pulled out and studied Daniel’s writing. They discussed it among themselves and came to the conclusion, “The time is right about now that the anointed one spoken of in this section of Daniel’s writing should be born.”

At the very same time, these scholars were puzzled by a new star in the sky, which seemed to be an indication to them that a great king had been born. They went back to Daniel’s writing, and saw that the great king should be born about that time, and that he could be found in Jerusalem.

These scholars from the east gathered together gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and journeyed many weeks to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they asked, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2).

Hundreds of years after Daniel wrote about the timing of Christ’s first advent, the wise men from the east read his writing

⁶ Michael Rydelnik, “Daniel,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1342.

and arrived in Jerusalem looking for the baby Jesus. They had correctly understood and interpreted his writing in what we now call the Old Testament regarding the timing of the first advent of Christ. And we are grateful to them for doing so.

II. Christ's Timing for His Second Advent

Second, let's look at Christ's timing for his second advent.

I was converted to Christ and became a Christian on Easter Sunday, April 18, 1976. I was in the South African Air Force at the time, and I was at home between two tours of duty in our war on terrorism. Shortly after my conversion, I went back to the front lines in northern Namibia. As a brand-new Christian, I read voraciously. One of the first books I read was *The Late, Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey. Now that I was a Christian, I wanted to know what was going to happen in the future. Lindsey wrote that we were in the last days before the imminent return of Christ. He speculated that the rapture might occur in the late 1980s, since that was one generation from the founding of modern Israel in 1948.

Jesus did not return, of course, in the late 1980s.

More recently, Harold Camping, General Manager and Bible Teacher of Family Radio, wrote a book titled *1994?* in which he speculated that Christ might return in 1994. When Christ did not return in 1994, he later claimed that the rapture would be on 21 May, 2011, followed by the end of the world on October 21 of the same year. Neither event, of course, took place.

There are still future predictions about the timing of Christ's second advent. You can find these predictions on the internet if you are interested.

Does the Bible give us any indication of the timing of Christ's second advent? Could we examine the Bible for clues as to the timing of Christ's second advent, like the wise men did in Persia, and successfully arrive at the right time?

During his last week on earth, Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:1-3). Jesus then gave his disciples an overview of events to come, both in the near and distant future. Regarding the timing of his second advent, Christ said in Matthew 24:36, **"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."**

Friends, if Jesus did not know the timing of his second advent, then we cannot guess it with any accuracy at all. But while the timing of his second advent is unknown, we may be sure that he will yet return a second time.

Conclusion

Therefore, having examined Christ's timing for his first and second advents, let us be prepared for Christ's timing at his second advent.

Untold numbers of people were unprepared for the first advent of Christ. But, after he came the first time, they could still turn and worship him, as did the wise men from the east.

When Christ comes the second time, that will be the end of history. There will be no second chance for anyone. So, take the time now to turn to Christ in repentance and faith so that you may be ready for his second advent. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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