

It's Getting Late

What is the Bible's best kept secret? How to find the will of God? How to get your prayers answered? The greatest secret is the date of Christ's return. The disciples asked; "when will this happen?" (Matt. 24:3), "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

The answer Jesus gave to the second question was, "It is not for you to know the times or dates (*or seasons*) the Father has set by his own authority" (1:7). The word for time is *chronos*, meaning an actual date. The word for dates or seasons is *kairos*, meaning the right or appropriate time. *Chronos* is earthly time; *kairos* is heaven's time.

Both words, times and dates, are in the plural. It sounds as if there are a number of things that need to happen; a schedule or agenda that has to be followed. This means that the return of Jesus will not be an isolated event but the culmination of a whole series of events.

Jesus gave a very lengthy answer to, "When will this happen?" You can read his answer in Matthew 24:4–35; Mark 13:5–27; Luke 21:8–28; Revelation 6:1–17. These parallel passages give a vivid description of conditions on earth immediately preceding his return. They are the "signs of the times"; distance markers along the road. It is estimated there are around 40 indicators that point to his return; we will highlight 12.

1. *International signs*

"You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom" (Matt. 24:6–7). "The rider on the red horse was given power to take peace from the earth and make people slay each other" (Rev. 6:4). The last 120 years has witnessed incredible conflicts including two world wars. WWI was considered "the war to end all wars" but sadly global conflicts are increasing not decreasing.

2. *Natural signs*

"There will be great earthquakes, fearful events, great signs from heaven" (Luke 21:11); "Nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive at what is coming on the world" (21:25–26). Earthquakes, natural disasters, unusual weather patterns and volcanoes have always happened, but they appear to be occurring at a greater intensity and frequency.

3. *Medical signs*

“There will be famines and pestilences in various places” (Luke 21:11). The rider on the black horse held a pair of scales in his hand saying, “A litre of wheat for a day’s wage” (Rev. 6:5–6). A report from the United Nations Chronicle claims 25,000 people die every day from starvation. We are blessed to live in a nation with excellent health care, tragically billions do not. Medical research continues to find cures for what were fatal diseases, but for every cure other new exotic diseases appear.

4. *Social signs*

“There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy and without love” (2 Tim. 3:1–5). “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.”

Nebuchadnezzar saw a vision of a statue made from different metals. The feet were made from a mixture of iron and clay; an unusual combination, leaving the feet partly strong and partly brittle; “the people will be a mixture and will not remain united” (Dan. 2:43). This describes conflict in families and between generations and cultures. In 2024, domestic violence has made the family home one of the most dangerous places on the planet; but not as dangerous as the womb!

5. *Morality signs*

“Justice is driven back and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets” (Isa. 59:14). What a graphic image, “truth has stumbled in the streets”. Low levels of spirituality bring low levels of morality. In Australia, we have moved on from same sex marriage to gender identity, with children choosing their gender and provided with medication or surgery to make their choice permanent.

6. *The Days of Noah*

“As it was in the days of Noah” (Matt. 24:37). Noah’s day was infamous for godlessness and violence. Without moral boundaries, people throw off all restraint; “All the people on earth had corrupted their ways; the earth is filled with violence because of the people” (Gen. 6:11–13).

7. *Signs in the Middle east – the people*

Israel’s history is a repeated cycle of dispersion and return, scattering and gathering. In 135, Hadrian barred Jews from entering Jerusalem. In 1517, only 5,000 Jews lived in Palestine. In 1947, just before Israel was declared a nation, 630,000 Jews lived there. By 2022, the Jewish population in Israel exceeded 7 million. It has been a remarkable return.

8. *Signs in the Middle East – the land*

Since 1948 there has been a transformation in Israel. The people, the land and the city of Jerusalem have flourished, despite several of Israel's neighbours denying their right to exist. The present violent conflict in Gaza appears to be isolating Israel from everyone; something Zechariah prophesied, "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of poison that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling" (Zech. 12:2), "In that day when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her" (12:3), "I will gather the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it" (14:2). A recent newsletter from Jennifer K. an Australian missionary in Jerusalem, wrote about the current struggles, "We expect things to get worse."

9. *Economic signs*

Revelation describes a global financial system; the technology for this is already available. The Bible predicts volatile economies when the rich will wail as their wealth erodes (Jam. 5:1–6; Rev. 18).

10. *Positive spiritual signs*

Joel prophesied a global outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will be a precursor of a global harvest, (Joel 2:23–24, 28–32). Church growth analysts claim the Church has never been larger or growing at a faster rate. The gospel is being preached to the whole world (Matt. 24:14) with more and more unreached people groups being evangelised, (Matt. 28:19, "all nations" *panta ta ethne*, nations being identified by cultural links rather than geographical or political boundaries).

11. *Negative spiritual signs*

The ten virgins were distinguished by the oil; the application of this is that the end times will be notable for churches who are Spirit-filled and those who are Spirit-less. Revelation 17 describes a godless, global, man-made religious system. In this century the rise of humanism and the merging of religions continues to accelerate.

12. *False Christs, Antichrists*

When Jesus answered the question, "when will this happen", his first response was, "Watch out that no-one deceive you. For many will come in my name claiming 'I am the Christ' and will deceive many" (Matt. 24:5). Paul wrote, "the day of the Lord will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:3–4). The spirit of the Antichrist has always been active; but in the End Times that spirit will be personified in an individual.

Other points

“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (Mark 13:30). This appears to say the End Times occurred in the first century. However, there are other possible views. (1) The disciple’s generation would see the destruction of the temple, “not one stone left on another” (Mark 13:2), fulfilled in 70AD. (2) The events would take place within the time span of one generation. (3) This generation could be translated as “this race of people” that is the Jews, would continue to exist until the End Times.

“Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). Paul wrote something similar, “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25). If this is connected to the rebirth of the state of Israel in 1948, then we may be living on the edge or overlap of time.

Biblical prophecy has a telescopic aspect. A telescope is a series of identical cylinders of increasing size. Bible prophecies can have multiple fulfilments each greater than the one before. For example, there are numerous types or forerunners of the Antichrist in the Bible and world history; Nimrod, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes, Herod, Nero, and others. Apply the telescopic idea to the signs; they have always been present but each cycle is getting larger and clearer.

How late is it?

Score each group of signs by placing a tick in one of the columns. A maximum score for each category (5) gives a score of 60 (the number of minutes in an hour). Add up your scores for your assessment of how late it is (a score of 54 would be 6 minutes to midnight).

	0	.5	1	1.5	2	2.5	3	3.5	4	4.5	5
Wars, armed conflicts											
Earthquakes, natural signs											
Plagues, famines											
Social signs											
Morality signs											
The Days of Noah											
Middle East –Jews return											
Israel prospering											
Economic signs											
Positive spiritual signs											
Negative spiritual signs											
False Christs											

Next week, session 4, “Where does Israel fit in?”