

# The Decline Of Apocalyptic Expectation

At the time of the First World war there was a feeling among gospel Christians that the end of this civilisation was near.

Many Christians were breathless with anticipation of a new world order about to emerge, at Christ's return to this earth to rule.

This new world order was called "*The Kingdom of God.*"

Jesus Christ did often talk about the "*Kingdom of God*" or "*Kingdom of [from] Heaven.*"

**Matthew 6:33** [NIV] "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*"

The driving force of our lives should be entry into this coming Kingdom of God.

**Matthew 12:28** [NIV] "*But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then **the kingdom of God** has come upon you.*"

The fact that Jesus stopped the influence of Satan and his demons on a person's life was proof that their lives were now heading towards the Kingdom of God.

**Mark 9:1** [NIV] "*And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see **the kingdom of God** come with power.*"

What did Jesus Christ mean by this statement?

**Acts 1:8** [NIV] "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

The power that was needed to fulfil the commission was given at Pentecost by the coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives. [Acts 2:1-4]

**Luke 17:20-21** [NIV] "*Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "**The kingdom of God** does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is **within you.**"*

At that time and until the return of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit within us is the Kingdom of God on earth.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** [NIV] "*Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety", destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. **Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**"*

Can this be said of Christians today?

Are we constantly alert to a sudden return of Jesus Christ, referred to as “*the Day of the Lord*” in this scripture?

Is this being constantly preached in our Christian churches?

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** [NIV] “*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*”

Are we all looking forward to this day when all Christians who have died and are still asleep in their graves, will be resurrected back to life, this time with eternal life and an eternal body.

Are we as Christians who are alive today expecting our feet to leave the ground as we, also in a new eternal body, rise to meet our Saviour in the clouds just above Jerusalem?

**Zechariah 14:1-2** [NIV] “*A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.*”

A time of horrific war in the Middle East. Note “*all nations*” influenced by Satan will seek to destroy this city that is central to Christian prophecy and worship.

**Zechariah 14:3-5** [NIV] “*Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.*”

Then all who have met with Jesus Christ will descend to the area of Jerusalem to begin their reign with Jesus Christ, forming the new kingdom on earth, the Kingdom of God.

**Matthew 6:10** [NIV] “*your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*”

Does this event comes into our minds when we pray these words as commanded by our Saviour Jesus Christ, “*Thy Kingdom come*”?

**This expectation for all Christians should be so real that it quite literally determines our outlook on this present world and our way of life.**

Christians in the past had hope for the future that motivated their day-to-day life, that we seem to lack today.

All Christians had this unified hope for the future and their activities were concentrated on this return of their Saviour.

All Christians fully expected to win this battle against evil.

Present day hope has been subjected to so much examination, analysis and revision, that most Christians do **not** have a clear cut understanding of their hope for the future.

**1 Peter 1:3-4** [NIV] *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you,”*

Our “new birth,” the result of our repentance, acceptance of Jesus Christ and our baptism, leads us into having this hope for the future.

**1 Peter 3:15-18** [NIV] *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,”*

If our day-to-day lifestyle invites questions from non-Christians, we should be ready to express this hope, backing it up with the scripture found in the Christian Bible.

Christians today are wrongly on the defensive, trying to prove things that previous generations of Christians never doubted, and preached with power and all authority.

**The causes for the decline of apocalyptic expectation are many, not least being the affluent society in which many Christians live.**

**Matthew 19:23** [NIV] *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

In the western world, Christianity has become the religion of the prosperous middle and upper classes almost entirely.

The very rich and the very poor rarely become practicing Christians.

When the bulk of Christians today come from this prosperous middle class, it is **not** difficult to see why apocalyptic hope has all but disappeared from among them.

It is hard to focus upon a better world to come when a more comfortable one than they are experiencing can hardly be imagined.

As long as science can make us cosy in this present society, it is hard to work up much pleasurable anticipation for a new world order.

**Another problem is that many professed Christians no longer have an adequate view of Jesus Christ.**

Jesus Christ is seen only as a personal Saviour, **not** as “*Lord of lords and King of kings.*” [**Revelation 19:16**]

Jesus Christ is **not** seen as a leader of a conquering army. [**Revelation 19:11-15**]

Jesus Christ is **not** seen as one who will cause all humans to bow before His judgement seat and receive their reward of eternal life or eternal death.

**Romans 3:18** [NIV] *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

This is a lack of awe of the Creator God, **not** realising who He is, what He is and our personal responsibility towards Him as our Creator and Sustainer as well as our Judge.

**Another cause of apocalyptic expectations is eschatological [the study of end times] confusion, with conflicting prophetic interpretations.**

I have limited my quotations of prophetic scriptures, giving you just, I hope, enough simple ones to prompt you to focus on the return of Jesus Christ and the setting up of the Kingdom of God on this earth.

I do **not** know whether or **not** it is possible to recapture the spirit of anticipation that animated the early church and cheered the hearts of gospel Christians only a few decades ago.

Certainly scolding will **not** bring this anticipation back, nor arguing over prophecy, nor condemning those who do **not** agree with us.

We may do all or any of these things without arousing the desired spirit of joyous expectation.

That unifying, healing, purifying hope is for the childlike, the innocent-hearted, the unsophisticated.

**Possibly nothing short of world catastrophes will destroy every false trust that humans, including Christians, have, and turn our eyes once more upon the Man Christ Jesus and bring back the glorious hope in Him to a generation that has lost it.**

A good place to start is the recorded words of Jesus Christ Himself as to what will be the sign of His second coming.

Then apply this to what we are reading in the daily papers, or see on television, and meditate on what Jesus Christ is saying to every generation.

**Matthew 24:3-35** [NIV] *“As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Jesus answered: “Watch out that no-one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours 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. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth-pains. “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 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. “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation’, spoken of through the prophet Daniel, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no-one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no-one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equalled again. If those days had not been cut short, no-one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. “So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. “Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*

**Mark 13:4-37** [NIV] *“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no-one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth-pains. “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no-one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no-one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now, and never to be equalled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no-one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect, if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. “But in those days, following that distress, “‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ “At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. “Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. “No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”*

**Luke 21:5-36** [NIV] *“Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, “As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.” “Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” He replied: “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.” Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. “But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life. “When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfilment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations.*

*Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. “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.” He told them this parable: “Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. **Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.**”*