

Bible Reading Guide

Week 1 He Will Come Again in Glory

Nov. 29	Revelation 1:4-9; 19:11-16; 21:1-5, 22-27; 22:1-5
Nov. 30	Zechariah 9:9-17; Romans 5:3-5; 8:18-30
Dec. 1	John 1:1-5, 14; Revelation 22:12-13, 20
Dec. 2	Mark 13:24-37; Luke 21:25-28
Dec. 3	2 Peter 3:8-15
Dec. 4	1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
Dec. 5	1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Week 2 God's Presence and His Promises

Dec. 6	Exodus 1:1-3:10
Dec. 7	Psalms 46, 112
Dec. 8	Isaiah 2:1-5
Dec. 9	Isaiah 40:1-11
Dec. 10	Isaiah 64:1-9
Dec. 11	Isaiah 9:2; John 1:4-5, 9
Dec. 12	Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7

Week 3 Immanuel: God with Us

Dec. 13	Matthew 1:1-17
Dec. 14	Luke 1:5-25
Dec. 15	Luke 1:26-38
Dec. 16	Matthew 1:18-24
Dec. 17	Luke 1:39-56
Dec. 18	Isaiah 9:2-7; 40:1-5; Luke 1:57-80; 3:1-6
Dec. 19	Luke 2:1-7

Week 4 A Savior Is Born

Dec. 20	Luke 2:8-20
Dec. 21	Luke 2:22-38
Dec. 22	Matthew 2:1-12
Dec. 23	Matthew 2:1-18; 1 John 3:8
Dec. 24	John 1:1-18
Dec. 25	Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:4-7; 1 Peter 1:3-5, 13

WEEK 1
HE WILL
COME AGAIN
IN GLORY

BIBLE STUDY

1. This has been a hard year. What words would you use to describe 2020? What difficulties or challenges—be they personal, community-wide, or global—made the year stressful, painful, or discouraging?

2. How do you tend to think of the word *hope*? What stands out to you from Jay Y. Kim's article "Hope Is an Expectant Leap" as particularly important regarding Christian hope?

3. Read and reflect on **1 Peter 1:3–5, 13**. What does it look like to embody a "living hope"? How does this passage challenge you?

4. Read **Romans 5:3–5; 8:18–30**. In your own life, how have you experienced the connection between suffering, hope, and love? How does waiting in expectation of Christ's return play a part in that hope?

5. Read **Revelation 1:4–8; 21:1–5, 22–27; 22:1–5**. What draws your attention in these passages, particularly in light of the hardships you named earlier? Why is having the Second Advent in view so crucial for our lives in the here and now?

LOOK, I AM COMING
SOON! . . . I AM THE
ALPHA AND THE
OMEGA, THE FIRST
AND THE LAST,
THE BEGINNING
AND THE END.

Revelation 22:12–13

6. Read **Revelation 22:20**. In his article, Charlie Dates emphasizes the importance of saying, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," amid our trials and frustrations. Reflect candidly on your own life: What does it mean for you to pray that today?

Week 1

He Will Come Again in Glory

We live in the “in between”—after Christ’s first coming and before his return. This week, we reflect on the nature of Christian hope as we await the Second Advent.



**LOOK, I AM COMING SOON! . . . I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA,
THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE BEGINNING AND THE END.**

Revelation 22:12-13

11/30 PROPHESY HOPE

BY DANTÉ STEWART

Zechariah 9:9-17
Romans 5:3-5; 8:18-30

**I CONSIDER THAT OUR
PRESENT SUFFERINGS
ARE NOT WORTH
COMPARING WITH THE
GLORY THAT WILL BE
REVEALED IN US.**

Romans 8:18

“Hope begins in the dark . . .” I could never quite shake these words from Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird*. This language of hope has recently become a theme in my life—not in the abstract sense, but as a living activity, a struggle, a commitment, a discipline.

Theologian Jürgen Moltmann rooted the language of hope in the resurrection of Jesus and the praxis of protest. Sometimes hope seems to be the only language powerful enough to counter despair. Or maybe it’s, in Lamott’s words, a sort of “revolutionary patience.”

Whatever hope is, there is something deep within each of us that cries out in expectation. Sometimes it sounds like a whisper, but it is there. Yet, while hope springs from the depths of the soul, it often comes out of the shadows. Hope begins in chaos.

Some days it feels like we have never escaped from under that cloud that covered the face of the earth during the crucifixion of Jesus. The brokenness and weight of our world feels so much like darkness that Elie Wiesel, retelling the horrors of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, could only call it Night. We have to tell the truth of pain and even the pain of hope.

I sat down with my grandmother some time ago and asked her to tell me about her life. At first she didn’t want to. One can only imagine what deep scars her soul has borne over 80 years. Her stories were hard. It’s difficult to describe what it meant for her to live in the South as a black woman. One word seemed to capture the audacity of survival in the midst of a cruel world: love. “The Lord hasn’t failed me yet,” she said.

Radical, life-changing, community-changing, world-changing love is, after all, the way of Jesus. He came preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing all manner of sickness and affliction. To prophesy hope is a dangerous love.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.” This is what it means to stand in the world as prophets of love, power, and justice or, to use the biblical language of Zechariah, to be “prisoners of hope” (9:12). As someone once said, “I don’t know what tomorrow holds, but I know who holds tomorrow.” While tomorrow is on the way, I’m going to prophesy hope today.

This is adapted from a longer article titled “Why We Still Prophesy Hope,” published on October 21, 2019, on ChristianityToday.com.

READ ZECHARIAH 9:9-17 AND ROMANS 5:3-5; 8:18-30. Reflect on what hope looks like “in the dark.” How does suffering produce hope and love? How can Christ’s first coming and future return enable you to prophesy hope today?

12/02 ADVENT AND APOCALYPSE

BY FLEMING RUTLEDGE

Mark 13:24–37
Luke 21:25–28

THEY WILL SEE THE
SON OF MAN COMING
IN A CLOUD WITH
POWER AND GREAT
GLORY . . . STAND UP
AND LIFT UP YOUR
HEADS, BECAUSE
YOUR REDEMPTION
IS DRAWING NEAR.

Luke 21:27–28

During Advent, we hear passages of Scripture that are infused with the language of darkness, tribulation, and apocalypse. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each have one fully apocalyptic chapter. In Mark 13, Jesus says, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (v. 8, RSV throughout). The passage only gets darker as it goes. “In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (vv. 24–25). Why is Jesus talking like this about death and destruction instead of talking about sheep, shepherds, and heavenly hosts?

In Scripture, apocalyptic writing comes out of catastrophe. The Israelites were a favored people; God had promised them a future of safety and prosperity. But then they were conquered and forced into exile in the Babylonian empire. Humanly speaking, there was no hope for them. When the Israelites found themselves in crisis, it was “a theological emergency.” It was out of this emergency that a new apocalyptic way of thinking took shape. It started with the second half of Isaiah (chapters 40–55)—written during the Babylonian captivity, when everything seemed so hopeless—and it blossomed from there. By the time of Jesus, apocalyptic language was everywhere.

Apocalyptic theology is, above all, the theology of hope—and hope is the polar opposite of optimism. Optimism fails when it is swallowed up in darkness. By contrast, hope is found in something beyond human history. It is found in an incarnate God.

In Luke’s gospel, when Jesus speaks apocalyptically of “signs in the sun and moon and stars” and the “distress of nations,” he ends by saying that humanity “will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (21:25–27). He is speaking of his second coming. He’s telling us that our great hope comes not through any human development but through himself. He possesses sovereign power that is independent of human history. In spite of the apparent darkness, God in Christ is shaping our history in accordance with his divine purposes.

Advent tells us to look directly into the darkness and name it for what it is. But this is not the end of the story. Jesus said, “Look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

This is adapted from a longer article titled “Why Apocalypse Is Essential to Advent,” published December 18, 2018, on ChristianityToday.com.

READ MARK 13:24–37 AND LUKE 21:25–28. Which parts of Jesus’ teaching do you gravitate toward? Which are harder to grapple with? How do these depictions of God’s sovereign power over history deepen your hope?

12/03
A MORE
IMPORTANT
QUESTION

BY VINCENT BACOTE

2 Peter 3:8-15

**BUT IN KEEPING WITH
HIS PROMISE WE ARE
LOOKING FORWARD
TO A NEW HEAVEN AND
A NEW EARTH, WHERE
RIGHTEOUSNESS DWELLS.**

2 Peter 3:13

What is taking so long? Why hasn't Jesus returned yet like he promised? The recipients of Peter's second letter may have been asking questions like these—questions that continue to echo in our time. Peter addressed them with a strange assurance: first, that God's timing reflects his patience and saving love and, second, that the Day of the Lord will be fearsome and will involve destruction by fire.

Apocalyptic language like Peter's (similar to Jesus' in Mark 13 and Luke 21) certainly gives us pause. What is meant by "destroyed by fire" and "destruction of the heavens by fire"? Is this something we ought to fear?

Earlier verses in 2 Peter provide some perspective for understanding the language of destruction used in chapter 3. In 2:5, we are given a parallel with the time of Noah, where God destroyed the earth by water. That past judgment did not mean God utterly washed away all of creation; similarly, the final judgment by fire likely does not mean God will incinerate the earth to make way for the arrival of the new heavens and earth. As Peter described it in Acts, Christ is in heaven "until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (3:21). The new world will come through God's great restoration and redesign of the world we have now.

Woven within this discussion, Peter poses an important question that deserves even greater focus than our wonderings about God's timing or what Christ's return will be like. In light of the coming Day of the Lord, Peter asks, "What kind of people ought you to be?" (2 Pet. 3:11). Peter urges a response of holy living and a hopeful anticipation, "looking forward" to the new heaven and new earth (vv. 11-14). We see these themes emphasized in Peter's first epistle, as he urges believers to live with a joyful confidence and alert, hopeful focus on Christ's coming (1 Pet. 1:3-5, 13).

We are people of hope, like those already told the ending of a novel full of twists, turns, and unexpected events. We know the end of the story; our knowledge of the amazing ending waiting for us can impact how we approach the present. We may not understand when or how it will happen, but we can trust that the end includes both judgment and vindication for God's people. How is the news of final judgment a reason for encouragement rather than fear? God is going to make even the best parts of this world better than we can imagine. Judgment, vindication, and transformation are coming. The true promised land awaits.

PONDER 2 PETER 3:8-15. (Optionally, also read 1 Peter 1:3-5, 13). What questions does this passage raise for you? What emotions does it stir up? How does your hope in the coming "Day of the Lord" impact your daily discipleship?



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ADVENT: LIVING HOPE

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Ideas For Families

SELECT SOME OF THESE IDEAS TO ENRICH YOUR FAMILY'S JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT.

Throughout Advent

- With teens or preteens, read and discuss the devotions together each evening. With younger kids, focus on just the Scripture passages and reflection prompts.
- Create a hope-focused “stained-glass window” that you’ll add to throughout Advent. Use a dry-erase marker (or a colored self-adhesive note) to write the word *hope* in the center of a window in your home. Use a thesaurus together to find and add related words that can help us understand biblical hope. Then, throughout Advent, use colored markers or notes to record words, ideas, images, symbols, or Bible verses from each day’s discussion and add them to the window.

Week 1

- Invite teens or preteens to read “Hope: An Expectant Leap” by Jay Y. Kim, then go on a challenging hike together. As you walk, discuss Kim’s hiking story and the idea that Christian hope is something that’s gritty and determined.
- With younger children, have fun using a joke book to tell each other silly knock-knock jokes. Afterward, talk about the idea that Jesus will one day *arrive*. He will come again!
- Ask, “What are some things in life that upset you, are unfair, or make you feel angry or hopeless?” (Optional: Use newspapers or online news sites to generate ideas regarding current events.) Record on a posterboard some of the evils, injustices, and painful realities of life, like war, abuse, cancer, poverty, racism, stress, personal conflicts, and so on. Then tear up the poster together as you talk about our ultimate hope in Christ’s future reign described in Revelation 21:1-5.

Week 2

- Find an online recipe for air-dry or no-bake salt dough, then use it to make simple Christmas tree ornaments as a family. The ornaments will need to dry for one or more days. Use the experience of waiting for the dough to harden as an opportunity to talk about Advent as a season of waiting. What were God's people in the Old Testament waiting for? How do we see hope in their waiting?
- Use a telescope or binoculars to look at far-off objects. Discuss how God used prophets like Isaiah to see some of what God would do in the future. Talk about some of the truths Isaiah foretold about Jesus.
- Turn off the lights in your house (other than Christmas tree lights) to play flashlight tag or flashlight hide-and-seek. Have fun together, then read Isaiah 9:2 and John 1:4-5, 9. Discuss Christ's identity as the light promised in Isaiah 9.

Week 3

- Play a quiet game to see who can be silent the longest. (Or challenge everyone to be silent for a set period of time.) Use this experience to discuss what Zechariah might have thought and felt during his long period of muteness as he waited for his son's birth and the coming of the Messiah.
- Have an upside-down dinner as a family. Sit under the table, wear clothing backward, eat food in reverse order, and so on. Use this silly experience to talk about how Mary's song pointed toward the upside-down nature of the kingdom. Discuss some of Jesus' teachings and actions that turned things upside down (the first shall be last, love your enemies, and so on).
- Go on a "choice drive" as a family to look at area Christmas lights. At each intersection, let a different family member choose if you'll turn right, turn left, or go straight. Afterward, use this experience to talk about the choices and decisions that Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph faced. How might they have felt in these situations? What motivated their choices or responses? What can we learn from them?

Week 4

- Reflect on the shepherds' and Anna's immediate response to seeing baby Jesus—telling others about him! Create a Christmas card as a family that tells about Jesus, then mail it to someone to share the Good News.
- Gather a baby picture of each family member. (If possible, even include baby pictures of grandparents and great-grandparents.) Look at the pictures and discuss each person's traits you may recognize even when they were babies. Use this experience to talk about how remarkable it was that Simeon and Anna recognized baby Jesus as the promised Messiah.
- Gather around your hope-focused stained-glass window and reflect together on the entire Advent season. How has everyone's understanding of Christian hope been enriched? What is one idea, verse, or biblical story that stands out most to each family member? How was each person's faith impacted through this experience of observing Advent together?