

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: THE EARLY CHURCH OF JESUS

After you've completed the five readings in this section, get together with another person or group to talk about the things you've learned. Begin by sharing the insights you gained from your own reflection on the passages. Then use the following questions to help you continue the conversation.

- 1 If Jesus came to your church, what do you think he'd say? What message would Jesus have for the churches in your country?
- 2 Is it a good thing that, in general, the Western Church doesn't face much persecution? How can a congregation remain faithful when they live in peace and prosperity?
- 3 How can a church that's become large, wealthy and powerful keep Jesus as its first love? Do you know of any examples?
- 4 How can a person who's become successful keep Jesus as their first love? Do you know of any examples?
- 5 Do you think Christians today have become 'too tolerant' or 'too extreme'? Why/ why not?
- 6 If you find yourself in a dead church, how can you know whether to find a new church or stay and try to make things better? Have you ever been in this situation? What happened?
- 7 Have you ever felt lukewarm in your relationship with God? Have you ever been in a church that felt that way? What could you do to help your church 'stay awake'?

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## THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

The Bible tells us that as Jesus was ascending into heaven after his death and resurrection, two angels appeared and said to the disciples, 'This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11). Ever since, the 'second coming' of Jesus has been eagerly anticipated by his followers in every age.

As early as the first century, however, questions began to emerge. Some people thought that the second coming had already occurred and that they had been left behind. Others thought that it would never happen and they mocked Christians who were still waiting. Still others used the confusion over the second coming to teach their own peculiar views of the end of the world. What's ironic is that all those things are still happening today.

That's why our next five readings are so useful; they'll help us clarify what the Bible says about this important topic. We'll begin by examining the ascension of Jesus; it's a preview of what his second coming will be like. Then we'll dig into the teachings of two key leaders in the early church – Paul and Peter – to find out how they answered the questions that were being raised. And finally, we'll take a look at Revelation 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the Bible, to get a picture of what the 'end times' will be like. And the encouraging thing is that the end is only the beginning of a new world with God at its centre!

But if the Bible is so clear about the second coming, why do so many still seem confused about it today? The answer, I believe, is that people take the information in the Bible to one of two extremes. Some make too much of the second coming; their whole worldview is built around the most obscure details of the end times. Others make too little of the second coming; for them, it might happen, it might not, but who cares?

That's why our goal in this section will be to form a balanced, biblical view of the second coming, because the Bible teaches beyond question that some day Jesus will come back in the same way that he went up into heaven. What a joyful day that will be!

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