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“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come,” Matthew 24:14.

Jesus Teaches About the Last Days

Lesson Aim: To stimulate renewed devotion to Christian responsibilities during these last days.

L188. Date: December 1973. **Text:** Matthew 24:3-14.

Topic: Christ: Return of; End Times.

“The end is coming! The end is coming!” The Bible says so. It does not make the announcement in such a dramatic way, but the New Testament declares, “. . . **the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer,**” I Peter 4:7. Almost every book in the New Testament contains some reference to the end of the age.

Jesus spoke of the last days. Though many details are wanting, He gave a surprisingly wide account of the circumstances surrounding the end. Jesus gave a distinct warning against any effort to set dates. He warned, **“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father,”** Mark 13:32. His further teachings may be found in Mark 13, Matthew 24 and 25, and Luke 21. It would be well for you to pause at this point to read those selected chapters.

This study aims “to encourage religious devotion during perilous times.” The times of the end will be times of great peril. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Know what Jesus said about the last days, and you will be the better able to face them without fear.

“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time,” I John 2:18.

I. THE END IS NEAR

Jesus promised, “. . . **lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,**” Matthew 28:20. His words have assured countless numbers of believers, but observe that they also foretell “the end of the world.” Jesus told of end of the world when He declared, “**Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away,**” Mark 13:31. The fact that there will be an end is assumed and stated many times in the teaching of Jesus.

The apostles took up the theme from their Master. They wrote of us as those “upon whom the ends of the world are come,” I Corinthians 10:11. John added, “**Little children, it is the last time . . .**” I John 2:18.

The doctrine was not initiated by Jesus. His teachings were the continuation of truths set forth in the Old Testament. “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end,” Psalm 102:25-27.

The creation which we know is not eternal. The world order, as we now see it, will not endure indefinitely. There will come a “last days” which will witness the end of the present order and the institution of a new. Be prepared. The end is coming.

II. PERILOUS TIMES AHEAD

A. False religions will arise, Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-26. A stirring of religious concern will mark the last days. It will not be a time when people seek the Book of God and the people of God in order to know the truth of God. On the contrary, cults and “isms” of many sorts will arise.

There will arise men who say, “**I am the Christ,**” Matthew 24:5. Those will be false Christs. In like manner, false prophets will testify, “**Lo, here is the Christ,**” Matthew 24:21. Many people will be led astray by the “great signs and wonders” which they will show, Matthew 24:24. Do not be deceived. Jesus foretold that they would come.

B. Religious apostasy will be common, Matthew 24:9-13. Jesus warned “many shall stumble” in their religious life because of the opposition, persecution, and hatred that they shall face. The false prophets shall lead many astray. The resulting increase in wickedness will cause the love of many to grow cold. A cycle will occur: apostasy, increasing wickedness, increasing apostasy. Not all people will turn from the truth. Even though the love of man shall grow cold, many others will endure to the end and thereby show that they are truly saved. As it happens in your lifetime, be forearmed for steadfast loyalty to Jesus. He warned that it would

come.

C. International distress will abound, Matthew 24:8. Wars and rumors of wars . . . nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom . . . earthquakes . . . famine, **“All these are the beginning of sorrows.”** So terrible will the pressure become that men's hearts will fail them for fear of the things which they see coming upon the earth, Luke 21:26.

Militarism will become common. Military powers will rise in the Orient capable of raising an army of 200,000,000 men, Revelation 9:14-16; 16:12. A great military power will arise to the north of Palestine and threaten that nation, Ezekiel 38:39.

Those things will mark the approach of the Great Tribulation. It is possible to see those events looming on the horizon today. How good to know believers will not be here to go through the time of tribulation.

D. Missionary activity will be greatly accelerated. When the Baptist Missionary Society of England sent William Carey to India in 1793, the modern missionary movement was launched. In 1800 there were seven missionary societies; by 1900 there were one hundred fifty. In 1800 the total income of those societies was \$50,000 annually; by 1900 the total annual income was \$15,000,000. In 1800 only one-fifth of the world's population had the Bible in its native language; by 1900 nine-tenths of the world's people had the Bible in their language. These are days of phenomenal missionary outreach. Since 1900 the increase in missionary evangelism has been as great as in the hundred years previous. Jesus said that it would be thus: **“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come,”** Matthew 24:14.

III. JESUS WILL RETURN

A. Time—Jesus will return at the end of the period called the Great Tribulation, Matthew 24:21-22, 29. When believers are caught away to meet the Lord in the air, the Holy Spirit will withdraw His restraining ministry upon earth, II Thessalonians 2:7. The result will be a time of tribulation upon earth “such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be,” Matthew 24:21. So terrible will be that time that unless it was soon brought to an end mankind would destroy himself, Matthew 24:22. **“Immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven . . .”** Matthew 24:29-30. The time of His coming is clearly identified: He will come to end the tribulation period.

B. Manner—Jesus will be revealed to all mankind. The first phase of

Jesus return will be the “rapture.” He will appear in the air and the saints will be caught up to meet Him. The second phase of His return will be the “revelation.” He will come to earth (at the end of the tribulation period) in full view of all men. The period between the rapture and the revelation is seven years. The rapture will be His coming as “a thief in the night.” The revelation will be “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” when “all the tribes of the earth” shall see Him. At the rapture, He will come for the saints. At the revelation, He will come with the saints. The revelation is discussed in Matthew 24:27-30.

C. Evidence—The “budding of the fig tree” means the revival of the nation of Israel. We have seen that prophecy fulfilled right before our eyes! In 1948 the nations of the world officially recognized the institution of the Nation of Israel. For the first time since Bible days, Israel was a nation. The fig tree had budded!

How sure can we be that the events will come to pass as stated in Matthew 24? Jesus declared, “**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,**” Matthew 24:35. Do not try to set dates for His coming. No one can do that. Be sure that He will come!

D. Reception—Nations will be filled with consternation when He appears. “. . . Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn . . .,” Matthew 24:30. Men shall doubtlessly try to “explain away” the events when the saints are taken away in the rapture. There will be no recourse but to admit the truth when He comes in the revelation. Most of the world will have followed false Christs, received the mark of the beast, and given honor to false prophets. His revelation will reveal how wrong they were. “**Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen,**” Revelation 1:7.

E. Challenge—“Watch and be ready!” Matthew 24:36-25:30. Watch; no man knows the date, 24:36. Watch; He will come at a time when least expected, 24:37-39. Watch; He will come in the midst of an ordinary day, 24:40-42. Watch; He will come when some are predicting that His coming is in the distant future, 24:43-51. Watch; He will come when most are unprepared, 23:1-13. Watch; His coming will call His servants to account for their stewardship, 25:14-30. “**And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch,**” Mark 13:37. While you wait and watch, prepare for His soon coming. It may be today!

F. Sequel—Jesus will establish the reign of righteousness upon earth. The Bible evidently announces that Jesus will set up a kingdom upon earth. Matthew 25:31-46 pictures the judgment of the nations at the time of His

return. It will be determined there which shall exist as nations during His rule of one thousand years upon the earth.

Man shall be left to himself for seven years between the rapture and the revelation. In that brief period, he shall bring such destruction upon himself that unless the Lord intervenes the entire race of mankind will perish. God shall be left out of man's plans. In so brief a time, he shall bring havoc upon himself.

Jesus will institute a reign of righteousness. It will continue for one thousand years. It will be a reign of peace and joy. It will continue to the benefit of man and the glory of God. What a day that will be!

During the reign of the Lord Jesus upon earth, many amazing events will transpire. (1) Satan will be bound and cast into a bottomless pit so that he will deceive the nations no more, Revelation 20. (2) The natural enmity between members of the animal kingdom will be erased so that the lamb and lion, the bear and the calf shall be together without harm, Isaiah 11:6-9, (3) Even the life span of man will be lengthened, Isaiah 65:20. What a day that will be!

Questions

1. Why will the end come?
2. Why should we not attempt to set a date?
3. How can we tell that the end is drawing near?
4. Why will false religions arise at the end?
5. Why will international distress increase?
6. What will happen in the field of missions?
7. What is the rapture and the revelation?
8. What do you know about "the budding of the fig tree"?