



“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 Speaks of the Last Days**

**Lesson Aim:** To encourage religious devotion during perilous times.

**L91. Date:** December 1970. **Text:** Matthew 24:3-14. **Topic:** End Times.

#### INTRODUCTION

**“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.

Jesus did not go into a great deal of detail about the order of events in the end of time. This was left to the writers of the Epistles and the Revelation as they were directed by the Holy Spirit. But Jesus spoke often of the last days and the end of the age.

There is a distinct warning in the words of Jesus that we must not become enamored with trying to set dates for the end of the world. He distinctly said, **“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.

But though many details are wanting, Jesus gave a surprisingly wide account of the fact of the end of the age and circumstances surrounding it. The following comments will seek to gather up some main portions of His teachings on that subject. The interested student will find it profitable to pursue the study further using his own study guide. Give particular attention to Mark 13; Matthew 24 & 25; Luke 21.

Today's study aims “to encourage religious devotion during perilous times.” To be forewarned is to be forearmed. If we know what Jesus said about the last days we will trust Him the more as they come.

## EXPOSITION

### I. THERE WILL BE AN END

Nowhere does the New Testament specifically state, “There will be an end.” But the idea is everywhere evident. Look, for instance, at the way the truth is assumed and stated in relation to other teachings. When Jesus wished to stress the endurance of His words He said, **“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away,”** Mark 13:31. This not only teaches that His words shall endure, but that the present heaven and earth shall not endure.

In these teachings Jesus was following truths which God had stated in the Old Testament as well. **“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.

When Jesus identified Himself (in Mark 13:31) with Him who created all things, He also identified Himself with the belief that all created things would come to an end. In other words, the creation as we now know it is not eternal. The world order as we now see it, will not endure indefinitely. There will come a “last days” which will see the end of the present order and the institution of a new.

### II. THE END WILL BE PRECEDED BY PERILOUS TIMES

The greatest discourse of Jesus on the events of the last days was given just shortly before His crucifixion. It seems to have been an effort to prepare His disciples for the shock of His death and for carrying on His work after His ascension.

Jesus suggests the destruction of the city of Jerusalem (which came in A.D. 70) was but a picture of the catastrophe which would bring the end of the age. The three subjects—destruction of Jerusalem, the second coming of Jesus, and the end of the world—are all presented in Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21. The following is but a broad outline of what Jesus said would precede the end of the present age.

1. False religions will arise. Read Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-26. The Lord Jesus warns that toward the end of the age in the “last days” there will be a stirring of religious concern. This would not result in people seeking out the

book of God, or the true believing people of God, in order to know the truth of God. It would express itself in people going after cults and “isms” of many sorts.

There will be “false Christs” who arise as well as “false prophets” who lead in the propagation of many religious sects. The false Christs would be some who arise saying, **“I am the Christ,”** Matthew 24:5. The false prophets will say, **“Lo, here is the Christ,”** Matthew 24:21. They will “show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect,” Matthew 24:24. And many will be led astray by them in the last days.

2. Many will turn from the truth into the error of the false religions. Read Matthew 24:9-13. Jesus warned that terrible opposition would beset the people of God in the last days. Tribulation, persecution, and hatred would be common. The result will be that “many shall stumble” and the false prophets “shall lead many astray.” The result of religious apostasy will be increasing wickedness. With the multiplication of iniquity, “the love of many shall wax cold.” And so the cycle turns: apostasy, increasing wickedness, increasing apostasy.

Observe, however, that not all people will turn from truth to error. It is stated that “many,” not all, will grow cold in their love. It is also stated that some will “endure to the end” and so show that they are truly saved. If you were living at that time and the entire world turned aside, you would still be obligated to be faithful just as you are now.

3. International distress will be common, Jesus warns of “wars and rumours of wars . . . nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom . . . earthquakes . . . famine.” “All these are the beginning of sorrows,” Matthew 24:8. In these words are summarized those terrors which cause men's hearts to fail them for fear of the things they see coming upon the earth. Luke 21:26.

Elsewhere the New Testament speaks of the rise of a world government, Revelation 13. Great military powers will also arise in the Orient (capable of raising a 200,000,000 man army!), Revelation 9:14-16; 16:12. And the prophet Ezekiel speaks of the rise of a great military power to the north of Palestine, Ezekiel 38-39. Woe to the world when these things begin to come to pass.

We can begin to see these things loom on the horizon. It is encouraging to know that believers will not be here to go through the time of great tribulation.

4. World-wide missionary activity will come during the approach of the last days. Jesus said, **“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.

Today we are in the midst of this world-wide missionary outreach. There is no nation where the gospel has not been proclaimed. Two-thirds of the population of the world is now within hearing of the gospel. Thousands of missionaries are spread around the world today bearing the testimony of Christ.

When the Baptist Missionary Society of England sent William Carey to India in 1793, the modern missionary movement was launched. In 1800 there were 7 missionary societies; by 1900 there were 150. In 1800 total income of these societies was \$50,000 but by 1900 the total annual income was \$15,000,000. In 1800 only one-fifth of the world population had the Bible in its native language but by 1900 nine-tenths of the people had the Bible in their language. Yes, we are living in a period of phenomenal missionary outreach. Jesus said it would be thus “in the last days.”

### **III. THE END WILL BE CLIMAXED BY THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS**

1. The time of His coming will be following the tribulation period, Matthew 24:21-22, 29. Jesus said there would come a time of tribulation on earth “such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be,” verse 21. So fierce will be that time of anguish that unless the days were soon brought to an end mankind would totally destroy itself, verse 22. Elsewhere the Bible tells that Christian believers will be taken out of the world, the Holy Spirit will change His ministry, and sinful men will be left to their own ways. This is what causes that time of great tribulation.

**“Immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. . .”** Matthew 24:29-30. Thus the exact time of the revelation of Jesus in His glory is declared.

2. The coming of Jesus will be the time of His revelation to all the earth. Elsewhere the New Testament declares that Jesus first comes in the air. Believers who have died are resurrected, believers who are living are transformed, and all are caught up to meet Him in the air. This is called the “rapture.” After a period of time (commonly believed to be seven years) the Lord Jesus will return to earth with His glorified saints. This is called the “revelation.” It is of the revelation that Jesus speaks in Matthew 24:27-30.

At His first phase of the second coming, He comes as a thief in the night. But in this second phase of His coming, He appears in full view of all. “All the tribes of the earth” will see Him “coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” verse 30.

3. The reaction of the nations on earth in those “last days” will be consternation and grief when the Lord returns. “. . . **Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. . .**” Matthew 24:30. The reason, of course, is that the majority of the world will have followed the false Christs with their false prophets and turned aside from the truth. The revelation of Jesus will reveal how wrong their belief has been and how baseless are their hopes. They shall mourn with great dismay. See Revelation 1:7 at this point!

4. The evidence of His coming is seen in “the budding of the fig tree,” Matthew 24:32-36. In the imagery commonly used in Scripture, the fig tree is a picture of the nation of Israel. The “budding of the fig tree” may well mean the revival of that nation. If so, we see it today!

When the events mentioned in Matthew 24 begin to come to pass it indicates that Jesus' coming is nearing. What things are a sign? International distress, religious apostasy, world-wide missionary concern, and the revival of Israel indicate these are the “last days” in which we are now living.

The certainty of these events are set forth in verse 35. The words of the Lord Jesus are more enduring and sure than even the heaven and earth. What He promises will surely come to pass. On the other hand, verse 36 warns against setting dates for these events to transpire. No man, nor angel, not even the Son knows the date. This the Father has kept in His own counsel. But come it will!

5. The challenge which accompanies these teachings on the last days is evident. In Matthew 24:36 thru 25:30 there is repeated stress put on one theme: “Watch and be ready!” Watch because no man knows the date. It may be today, 24:36. Watch because He will come at a time when least expected, 24:37-39. Watch because He will come when people are in the midst of common daily affairs, 24:40-42. Watch because He will come when some are predicting that His coming is long delayed, 24:43-51. Watch because He will come while most are sleeping and many are unprepared, 25:1-13. Watch because His coming will call His servants to account concerning what they have done with what they have had, 25:14-30. Jesus concludes his teaching with these solemn words, “**And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch,**” Mark 13:37.

6. The sequence to His coming is the institution of His kingdom on earth. From the announcement of His coming birth to the prophecy of His second coming, it is evident the New Testament speaks of a Kingdom which Jesus will set up on earth. Matthew 25:31-46 pictures the judgment of the nations at the time of His return. There shall be determined which shall exist as nations during His rule on earth of 1,000 years, after which time shall be no more.

Man was left to himself for seven years (when believers were caught away). In that brief period he brought such destruction down upon himself that unless the Lord intervened the entire race of mankind would have perished. This was because God was left out of his plans. But when Jesus rules in righteousness, 1,000 years can endure to the benefit of man and the glory of God. What a day that will be!

## CONCLUSION

There is a date set at which God will intervene in human affairs by the appearing of the Lord Jesus. He will catch away the believers of all generations to meet Him in the air. For seven years they will be with Him as they stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and attend the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Meanwhile, upon the earth there is increasing distress. False prophets who represent false Christs lead the populace into deeper and deeper religious apostasy. The Anti-Christ appears and terrible anguish breaks out upon the world in the time known as “the great tribulation.” In the midst of this dismay of men, Jesus will appear with His saints. He will judge the nations and establish His kingdom of absolute righteousness. He will thus reign upon the earth for 1,000 years and then the end of time will come. All these details are not set forth in the teachings of Jesus. But what He taught is further developed by the Epistles as the Holy Spirit gave the writers guidance. And thus we have understanding as to the last days. We are living in the last days now. Watch!

## QUESTIONS

1. How does I John 2:18 relate to this study?
2. What is “the last days”?
3. How does Mark 13:31 relate to the study?
4. What perilous times will precede the end?
5. Why will people turn to false religions?
6. Why will international distress be common?
7. What evidence is there that we are in the last days?
8. What is your part in the world missionary movement?
9. How is this teaching a challenge to soul-winning?
10. How can you “watch and be ready”?