

MY BIBLE SCHOOL

LESSONS

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #6: What the Bible Says About: "Signs of the End"

SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 24

*Memory Verse: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."
Matthew 24:42*

Every Hebrew felt an understandable pride in the Temple at Jerusalem. This feeling was shared by Christ's disciples who, one day, pointed out its beauties to the Master. Instead of expressing wonder at the magnificence of the Temple, however, Jesus took the opportunity to say. "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately. saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world?"

From this question it seems apparent that the disciples thought the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world would take place at the same time. Hence, in His answer, Christ outlined the parallel conditions that would prevail before both of these events. In this lesson, we will study only those things that are a primary application to the second coming of Christ.

1 - WHAT THREE GREAT SIGNS DID CHRIST SAY WOULD APPEAR IN THE POLITICAL WORLD?

1. Fear and perplexity.

***Luke 21:25-27:* "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear. and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."**

Winston Churchill expressed the concern felt by millions when he stated: "We seem to be moving, drifting steadily against our will, against the will of every race, and every people, and every class, toward some hideous catastrophe. Everybody wishes to stop it, but they do not know how."

When others are looking to the future with despair, the Christian whose faith rests on the "sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1: 19) will be filled with hope as he recognizes the promised signs of Christ's soon return.

2. Spirit of war.

Matthew 24:6-7: "Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (*Revelation 11:18; Joel 3:9-14*).

The cost of World War I has been estimated at 400 billion dollars. The cost of World War II is beyond accurate computation. During the decade that followed that holocaust, the U.S. alone spent \$327 billion for defense.

It is not too much to say that war-preparation for war, payment for past wars, and trying to prevent future wars-has become the chief concern of mankind.

3. Great efforts for peace.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3: "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them."

Jeremiah 6:14: "They have healed also My people slightly saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."

The accuracy of Bible prophecy is here demonstrated by predicting that, in the very midst of unprecedented preparation for war, there would be widespread talk of peace. The historian, Hazen, has confirmed this by saying, "The contemporary world, to a degree altogether unprecedented in history, has been dominated by the thought of war, by extraordinary preparations for war, and by zealous and concerted efforts for peace." We have already seen illustrations of this on a small scale. In 1914, at the very time that ambassadors and statesmen were gathered to dedicate the Peace Palace of the Hague, Archduke Ferdinand and his wife were murdered in the streets of Sarajevo, and the fuse to World War I was lighted.

More recently, we recall that bombs were rained on Pearl Harbor at the very time when representatives from both nations concerned were meeting to discuss steps toward peaceful relations. Today's earnest conferences among the world's leading powers aim to secure lasting world peace; but, even if apparently successful, they are only signs of Christ's coming and the overwhelming destruction that will accompany that great event. "For when they shall say, Peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon them" (1 *Thessalonians 5:3*).

2 - WHAT CONDITIONS WILL PREVAIL IN THE SOCIAL WORLD IN THE LAST DAYS?

2 Timothy 3:1-5: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of there own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

The horrible crimes recorded each day in the newspaper testify that society has reached the low ebb of morality pictured in these verses.

3 - IN THE ECONOMIC WORLD, WHAT CONDITIONS POINT TO CHRIST'S RETURN?

James 5:1-8: "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers, who have reaped down your field, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

As "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," the age-long conflict between employer and employee is destined to assume larger proportions. Now it is no longer one individual bargaining with another. Instead great corporations negotiate with the organized forces of labor, representing millions of workers. Since the dispute between management and labor will not end until Jesus comes, the Christian is urged to be patient until that time" (*James 5:8*).

4 - WHAT TWO GREAT CHANGES WERE TO APPEAR IN "THE TIME OF THE END"?

Daniel 12:4: "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

The past 150 years stand apart from all previous history by reason of the sudden increase of knowledge in science, general learning, and invention. The patriarch, Abraham, who lived four thousand years ago, would hardly be more startled by the tremendous changes than would George Washington, who died just before the nineteenth century began.

The great increase of knowledge concerning God's Word has been as extraordinary as advances in the world of science. Whereas the Bible was available only to a comparatively few two centuries ago, today it is being circulated on a worldwide scale, by hundreds of millions of copies. This has largely been accomplished since the great Bible societies were organized after 1798. Truly we are living in "the time of the end."

Daniel's prediction that "many shall run to and fro" has likewise received most striking fulfillment. Many commentators believe that this expression refers primarily to the increased activity in searching the Bible and its prophecies that has been evident during the past century. Although we recognize this as its first application, beyond a doubt it also forecasts the tremendous increase of travel on a global scale that has characterized the past fifty years. The restless populations of the world are on the move by foot, automobile, rail, ship, and airplane. No longer do the great oceans isolate continents and nations; for air travel has shrunk distances until statesmen transact business today in foreign capitals across the seas, and tomorrow they can be back in their own offices.

5 - WHAT SIX OUTSTANDING SIGNS ARE IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD?

1. Scoffers.

2 Peter 3:3-4: "Know this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, saying. Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

The theory of uniformity ("all things continue as they were"), with its inevitable repudiation of the Biblical account of the Flood, has encouraged many, even Christians, to scoff at the doctrines of Christ's second coming.

2. Form of godliness - mere profession.

2 Timothy 3:1, 2, 5: "In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves. . having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."

Today it is difficult to tell the difference between most professed Christians and the ungodly. They look alike, eat and drink alike, go to the same places, and do the same things.

3. Lovers of pleasures.

2 Timothy 3:4: "Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God."

The prayer room has become the supper room. Dancing is more popular than praying. Television, horse racing, and theatergoing are preferred by millions, above a knowledge of God.

4. Lack of faith.

Luke 18:8: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"

The parable of Luke 18:1-8 indicates that the prayer of faith will be almost nonexistent "when the Son of man cometh." This is understandable, for modernistic teaching has undermined belief in God as a real being.

5. Lack of love.

Matthew 24:12: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."

Many, seeing hypocrisy even in some church members and almost universal corruption elsewhere in the world, lose courage and love grows cold.

6. The gospel shall be preached in all the world.

Matthew 24:14: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

The message of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and His soon second coming is being sounded in about eight hundred language and dialect areas of the world.

6 - WHAT THREE UNUSUAL SIGHTS IN THE HEAVENS WERE FORETOLD AS SIGNS OF THE END?

***Matthew 24:29-30:* "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened. and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven. and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (*Joel 3:15; Revelation 6: 12, 13*).**

The great period of tribulation mentioned in connection with these unusual sights in the heavens is known in history as the Dark Ages. As you will learn, God had revealed, through Daniel, the prophet (*Daniel 7:25*), that this time of papal supremacy would commence in AD. 538 and last until AD. 1798 Public persecution ceased, however, about 25 years before the full 1,260 years had elapsed, due to the combined influence of the Protestant Reformation and the opportunities for religious freedom in America.

Now note the accuracy of Christ's prediction in Mark 13:24, where He says, "In those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light." The first of these signs appeared after persecution ended, "in those days," or shortly before 1798. God's Word never fails: hence on May 19, 1780, the sun was darkened. Early in the day the birds disappeared, domestic fowl went to roost, and grazing cattle in the pasture wended their way toward the barnyard. That same night the moon was darkened and gave the appearance of blood (*Revelation 6: 12*).

"The stars shall fall from heaven," These, of necessity, would be shooting stars. As predicted, the greatest meteoric shower ever recorded seemed to set the very heavens ablaze on the night of November 13, 1833. The minds of men were made sober at the time, and contemporary writings indicate that many feared the final Day of Judgment had come.

7 - IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD, WHAT CONDITIONS POINT TO OUR LORD'S RETURN?

***Matthew 24:7:* "And there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places."**

Famine and pestilences often accompany or follow great wars. After world War I, famine in China numbered fifteen million starving and three million dead. Russia's famine, according to the explorer, Nansen, was the "most appalling in the recorded history of man." The world's influenza epidemic took 18,000,000 lives. World War II had its own grim story of hunger and disease.

Earthquakes are another sign of Christ's return. Scientists estimate that as many as one million quakes a year may be taking place in the world, only about 8,000 of which are severe enough to be recorded. Of the more disastrous ones of comparatively recent times, we might list the following: 1920--China, 180,000 killed; 1923-Japan, 143,000 lives lost; 1939-Central Turkey, 23,000 dead; 1950-Tibet, India, and Burma, 5,000 casualties.

8 - HOW NEAR IS CHRIST'S COMING WHEN WE SEE ALL THESE SIGNS?

***Matthew 24:32-34:* "Now learn a parable of the fig tree. When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye,**

when ye shall sees all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

Naturally the last generation to live on this earth will be, as Jesus said, the one that sees "all these things." Surely we see them today, and may know that the coming of the Lord is "even at the doors."

9 - WHAT ATTITUDE OF LIFE SHOULD WE MAINTAIN IN THESE DAYS OF EXPECTATION?

***Matthew 24:36-42:* "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but My Father only. As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking' marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so also the coming of the Son of man be . . Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."**

The people of Noah's day had received adequate warning of the coming Flood, but they were afflicted with the same sins that beset modern man—unbelief, preoccupation with pleasure seeking, and procrastination.

Some years ago, during the great Mississippi flood, many personal tragedies testified to the dangerous results of doing this.

Acting on the bulletins of warning, one man packed up his goods to move, but his neighbor said there was no danger. He unpacked, and then saw the water mock him.

A woman said, "I don't see any water." Soon she did see it, and was frantic with fear. Unbelief had caused her plight.

A young man went out to bring in a family, but the farmer was not concerned and said, "Come back this afternoon." Later in the day, when the man returned, the farmer said, "Come back in the morning." The next morning the family still had not packed, so suggested that he come again the next day. He did; but, from a distance, he could see that the house was already flooded and no one was in sight.

To the people of His day Jesus said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (*Luke 24:25*).

They were content to let others search the Scriptures for them, and were satisfied with their creeds and traditions; and, as a result, they turned aside from the Saviour of the world. But is not human nature much the same today? Is not unbelief just as tragic now as in Noah's day or in the time of Christ?

In His great love, God has given us many signs that show Christ's coming to be near. These signs have been given that we and our dear ones may be ready when He comes. Are you not grateful for the evidences all about us that indicate that soon we shall see Jesus face to face? The world around us may be in perplexity and strife, but we can rejoice that soon all this will pass away and an eternity with Christ will stretch out before us. There is no doubt about it. If we follow the advice of Jesus to "watch therefore," we will be ready.

Brief Review Questions

Over twenty signs, which tell us Christ's coming is near, are discussed or quoted in this lesson; list at least ten of them.

SIGNS OF THE END SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

"Looking down through the ages to the close of time, Peter was inspired to outline conditions that would exist in the world just prior to the second coming of Christ. 'There shall come in the last days scoffers,' he wrote, 'walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.' But 'when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them' (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Not all, however, would be ensnared by the enemy's devices. As the end of all things earthly should approach, there would be faithful ones able to discern the signs of the times. While a large number of professing believers would deny their faith by their works, there would be a remnant who would endure to the end.

"Peter kept alive in his heart the hope of Christ's return, and he assured the church of the certain fulfillment of the Saviour's promise, 'If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself' (John 14:3). To the tried and faithful ones the coming might seem long delayed, but the apostle assured them: 'The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night' (2 Peter 3:9-10)." -*Acts of the Apostles*, 535-536

ON THE EDGE OF THE END

Only the most shallow-minded dare ignore the times in which we live. We are on the edge of the end. The destructive weapons of modern technology are such that our only safety is in God. Only in Him and in His Holy Bible can we find a safe refuge, the security we need.

Over 50 years ago, our planet was on the verge of destruction when that infernal device, the nuclear bomb, was invented. We are even closer to it today, -for now there are ways to deliver that bomb and more advanced weapons halfway across the world within half an hour.

Let us briefly turn our eyes back to a time when men still had enough sense to be worried. Think not that the crisis they faced was any less than the one in which we now find ourselves. At the present time, there are over 70,000 nuclear bombs stored in the world; and, starting a few years ago, many bombs are being regularly sold to rogue nations with crazed military leaders. When the following words were written, there were less than 10 nuclear bombs in existence!

"If men and nations would but live by the precepts of the ancient prophets and the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, problems which now seem so difficult would soon disappear. . Unless this is done, we are headed for the disaster we deserve. "-*President Harry S. Truman, Biennial Report for 1946, p. 109.*

"I am a frightened man, myself. All the scientists I know are frightened - frightened for their lives - and frightened for your *life*."-*Harold C. Urey, atomic scientist, "I'm a Frightened Man," Saturday Review of Literature, August 7, 1948.*

"Today the world is sick with. . a many-dimensional fear. . Against the atomic bomb there is no defense. Just below the surface lurks the diplomat's fear: If we give away the atomic power secret, we will lose our bargaining power. *But there is no atomic power secret.* It can easily be recreated by scientists elsewhere. . This new power is a discovery at least as great as man's discovery of fire. Who can predict what will come of it?" H. M. Davis, *editorial in Chemistry magazine, November, 1945.*

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"A new era is upon us . . . We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door."-General Douglas MacArthur, spoken on the day Japan surrendered. *New York Times*, September 2, 1945.

"When the scientist has emerged from his laboratory to prophesy our extinction, unless we mend our incorrigible ways, and science editors have turned into Jeremiahs, how can any man . . . contemplate his children's or others' future with any satisfaction?" - Harrison Smith editorial. *Saturday Review of Literature*. August 21, 1948.

"If the world is long to survive, the gigantic power which man has acquired through atomic energy must be matched by spiritual strength of greater magnitude. All mankind now stands in the doorway to destruction. "-President Harry S. Truman, March 6, 1946, *Biennial Report*, 1946.

"The devastation that could be wrought by an Atomic Age war is too appalling to be fully realized. The vision stuns our imagination. But if present trends continue it is only a question of time before such a war will come. "-Charles A. Lindbergh, *Reader's Digest*, September, 1948.

"The inexorable 'either-or' of the atomic bomb, upon which hangs the fate of life on this planet, leaves the pride of man no means by which to save itself. The only alternative to Armageddon is repentance and regeneration. . . The conversion of man has suddenly become a life-and death issue, not merely for individuals, but for the race."-Richard M. Fagley, secretary of the Peace Commission, November, 1945.

"Scientists themselves now proclaim that their science has reached the point in its development where it becomes imperative to do something about man. They prophesy doomsday unless their warning is heeded. . . With one voice they declare that the future is precarious, and

with one voice they declare that it is precarious because of man . . . [The problem is] man's nature which science now gravely fears may cause his destruction and the destruction of the earth with him. Science and Christianity are now looking at the same thing in man. Science has no word for it, but Christianity has. That word is sin. "-Charles Clayton Morrison, *Christian Century*, March 13, 1946.

"We are on our way towards removing the last barrier that prevents man from converting the earth into a planetary crematorium." *Norman Cousins*, editorial, *Saturday Review of Literature*, August 7, 1948.

"The end of human existence on earth was regarded by the early Christians as near at hand; by modern Christians as far in the future. . . What is new in the present situation is not the possibility of a last generation, but the possibility. . . that ours may be the last generation!" *Ernest Fremont Tittle*, *Christian Century*, May 1, 1946.

"The plain fact is that we're worse off as a world than we were three years ago. Worse off because we've stopped thinking about the whole problem. . . Some people are beginning to say this man-made earthquake isn't so bad after all. *Believe me, it is.*" *David Lilienthal*, Chairman U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, quoted in *Life*, September 27, 1948.

"Since all these things are thus on the verge of dissolution, what sort of men ought you to be in all holy living and godly conduct, expecting and helping to hasten the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens, all ablaze, will be dissolved, and the elements will burn and melt" 2 Peter 3:11-12, *Weymouth* (cf: verse 13-14).