

Lesson 8 – 19 December 2010.

Signs of the King's Return

Lesson Scope: [Matthew 24](#)

Lesson Focus

Jesus concluded His denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in the temple with a great lament, which incidentally was His last public message here on earth.

As they were leaving the temple, the disciples called Jesus' attention to the amazing construction of the temple. Likely their purpose in doing this related to what Jesus had just said at the close of chapter 23. Jesus had plainly foretold the utter destruction of the temple, even to the pulling apart of the stones—some of which were nearly forty feet long and weighed one hundred tons.

They journeyed to the Mount of Olives, where the disciples then asked some questions they apparently had pondered along the way: "Tell us, when shall these things be' and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world" Some of the details of Jesus' answer to the disciples seem to have multiple fulfillments relating to the destruction of Jerusalem and also to details surrounding Jesus' return. Jesus gave not only signs that would precede the coming of judgment but also warning against deception and spiritual lethargy.

Rejection of the Messiah-King brings tribulation and leads to ultimate judgement. Jesus has forewarned of these end-time events so that we will watch and be ready.

To some this may appear to be a perplexing passage. Studying and understanding the context of Scriptures, however, always requires diligence. Second Peter says in 1:19-21, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

One note in grasping the importance of this chapter is to understand that Jesus was speaking to His Jewish disciples about the Jewish nation. We

know that Jesus spoke of the Jews' rejection of Him and His rejection of the Jews in Matthew 23:37-39 until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

Equally important is the instructive teaching found here for all of us on this side of eternity.

Lesson Aim: To identify conditions and warnings associated with the warnings of the age.

Theme Verse: [Romans 13:12](#). “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”

Lesson Outline:

I. The Conditions.

II. The Warnings.

Lesson Text.

[Matthew 24:4-14](#)

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. ⁵For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. ⁶And 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. ⁷For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. ⁸All these are the beginning of sorrows. ⁹Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. ¹¹And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. ¹²And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. ¹³But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. ¹⁴And 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 24:23-24](#)

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. ²⁴For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew

great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

[Matthew 24:27-28](#)

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ²⁸For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

[Matthew 24:32-42](#)

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: ³³So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. ³⁴Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. ³⁵Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

³⁶But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. ³⁷But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ³⁸For 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, ³⁹And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ⁴⁰Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. ⁴¹Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

⁴²Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

[Matthew 24:46-51](#)

Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. ⁴⁷Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; ⁴⁹And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; ⁵⁰The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Questions for Study

The Conditions

1. Why is deception such a large factor in end-time events?
2. How can the conditions in Matthew 24:5-12 be signs when they have ex-

isted ever since the church was born?

3. How does Christ's Second Coming parallel the days of Noah?

The Warnings

4. What helps do we have for endurance in an era of cooling love, iniquity, deceit, and offenses?

5. Why is it essential to believe in the imminent return of the Lord?

6. How are God's justice and mercy revealed in His end-time dealings with man?

7. How will a faithful and wise servant live today?

Analyzing the Passage

We can best understand this passage when we recognize that the context of Jesus' Olivet discourse surrounds the future of His own people who had rejected Him as the Messiah-King (Matthew 23:37-39).

Although deception characterizes the entire Church Age, it greatly intensifies as we approach the time of Christ's Second Coming. In 24:8 Jesus mentions the beginning of sorrows (birth pains), indicating a travailing process. Beginning indicates that much more, and more severe, is yet to come. There are wars and rumors of more wars to come and also natural disasters. Yet, even in the face of almost impossible circumstances, some will endure in the faith and will spread the Gospel to all the world.

The events spoken of in Matthew 24:15-21 are foretold by Daniel in Daniel 9:27 and 12:1. Jesus also spoke of a great tribulation such as had not been experienced before upon this earth (Daniel 12:1; Joel 2:2). Extra-Biblical history records that the Christians heeded Jesus' warning and fled Jerusalem as soon as the first Roman general withdrew his armies. Not one Christian perished when Jerusalem fell.

The thought in Matthew 24:28 is better understood in the larger context given in Luke 17:34-37. In regards to the final separation in which some are taken while others are left, the disciples asked, "Where, Lord?" Jesus answered with the illustration of the eagles. Just as they are drawn to a dead body, in time of judgment, people will be found relating to the things that have attracted them in life.

Jesus summarized His discourse with a parable of the fig tree (and all the trees—Luke 21:29). Just as the breaking forth of leaves was a sure sign that summer is at hand, these developments would be a sure sign that the looked-for day is at hand. "All these things" (Matthew 24:33-34) must re-

fer to the signs Jesus gave before verse 32, where the parable begins. Another key phrase in Matthew 24:34 is "this generation." The Gospel writers collectively record more than ten separate times in which Jesus refers to the Jews of His day with these or similar words.

The people in Matthew 24:36-41 are oblivious to coming judgment. It will take the wicked by surprise just as a thief in the night.

Principles and Applications

The Conditions

1. Satan's religious counterfeits will deceive many (Matthew 24:4-5). Satan has been a deceiver since the beginning, and he will continue deceiving until the end. Satan seeks nothing more than to delude the masses. The nominal church today is saturated with counterfeits. Many today have a glowing testimony for the Lord and a fervent interest in evangelism. They have the right language, but they are not living in Biblical obedience, neither are they manifesting the fruit of the Spirit.

2. End-time opposition will cause many to give up the faith (Matthew 24:9-12). The end-time combination of deception and persecution becomes extremely perilous to spiritual life. While we today may not be experiencing intense persecution, we know that the Scriptures do not promise religious freedom. It is a bit difficult for us to comprehend the severe pressure to give up the faith under a government that is committed to stamping out Christianity. For the faithful in trial, however, God provides abundant grace and strength.

3. Only those who endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13). The key to victory is endurance. We all have those times when we perhaps feel more triumphant or victorious in our experience. The times we feel most like giving up are the times that most require God's help for endurance. Our loving Father never allows us to face tests to our faith and fortitude that we cannot overcome with His help.

4. God in mercy sufficiently warns the sinner before destruction (Matthew 24:14). This verse is indeed a picture of the mercy of God. Jesus commissioned His followers to take the Gospel to every creature so that everyone may hear and repent. In the Judgment Day, sinners will be speechless because they failed to live up to the knowledge they had.

5. Christ's prophetic words will surely be fulfilled (Matthew 24:34-35). He has power to bring all to pass. His words are far more certain and definite

than the tangible heaven and earth that we can see above and feel beneath. How that should strengthen our faith as end-time pressures increase!

The Warnings

6. Christ's sudden return closes the door of opportunity for the Christ rejecters (Matthew 24:38-40). The picture in Matthew 24:38 is one of people engaging in the normal activities of life. However, our conduct amid the normal activities of life also determines our destiny. For those who have carelessly lived in

disobedience and rebellion, Christ's return will constitute a summons for judgment upon their evil deeds. They will have no second chance!

7. The King will reward those who faithfully watch and work for Him (Matthew 24:42-47). He offers not only salvation for those who endure but also ample reward for faithful service. The King's blessing is a reward (Matthew 24:46). There is also the reward of a guaranteed place of service in the everlasting guarantee of our Lord. The King's reward for faithfulness is immeasurable in contrast to the awful fate of the wicked.

8. A firm belief in the Lord's imminent return is a strong deterrent to passiveness and earthly intoxication (Matthew 24:42, 45-51). No one knows the exact time of the coming of the Son of Man. Sometimes the saying "When the cat's away, the mice play" is used in regard to children. There is a real sense in which this concept applies with eternal proportions to adults as well. What is it that brings your greatest joy and fulfillment in life? Is it money? Is it in eating the best food or in joking or lighthearted banter? Or do we find fulfillment in living and working for our Lord? Faithful and self-sacrificing service will be richly rewarded when Christ returns.

9. The Lord will pour out His judgment on those who are unprepared to meet Him (Matthew 24:48-51). Even though God is long-suffering and merciful, His righteousness and holiness demand the outpouring of wrath on the wicked. The subject of hell with its weeping and gnashing of teeth does cause one to shudder, but it also is very instructive to the child of God. Let us therefore watch and be ready!

Answers to Questions

1. Why is deception such a large factor in end-time events?

Deception has been one of Satan's primary tools since the beginning of time, and it will only increase as we approach the end. End-time deception, engineered by Satan, seeks to mimic the true more than ever before histori-

cally deception has been more effective than persecution in causing men to apostatize. Deception sets in deeper because men "willingly are ignorant" (2 Peter 3:5).

2. How can the conditions in Matthew 24:5-12 be signs when they have existed ever since the church was born?

There is a great increase in the quantity and intensity of these signs. See also Luke 21:11. This increase is but the beginning of manifold sorrows yet to come (Matthew 24:8). Apostasy is more rampant today than ever before, and it is increasing.

3. How does Christ's Second Coming parallel the days of Noah?

Men continue to do the normal things they always have done—marrying, eating, drinking, and so forth. Life continues on at a seemingly routine pace while men are oblivious to the impending judgment—not because they do not have opportunity to know, but because they do not want to.

4. What helps do we have for endurance in an era of cooling love, iniquity, deceit, and offenses?

We can maintain a vibrant personal relationship with God. We have the church with its guidance and fellowship of believers. We have God's promises to the faithful to spur us on.

5. Why is it essential to believe in the imminent return of the Lord?

Otherwise we would live carelessly and fail to be prepared for our Lord's coming. The incentive to right living would be gone. We would also lose the challenge to watch and would fall asleep spiritually.

6. How are God's justice and mercy revealed in His end-time dealings with man? Man has had plenty of opportunity to hear the Gospel and repent (Matthew 24:14). There are faithful witnesses in every era (24:24). Those who do not repent are standing in open rebellion of an almighty God and rightly deserve judgment.

7. How will a faithful and wise servant live today?

Jesus said, "Occupy till I come." In other words, be busy doing the right things in His absence. A faithful and wise servant will be a good steward of what has been entrusted to him (Matthew 24:45). He is concerned about His family's spiritual welfare. Also, he is honest and open and has nothing to hide. A faithful and wise servant lives every day as if it were his last.

Important Teachings

1. Satan's religious counterfeits will deceive many (Matthew 24:4-5).
2. End-time opposition will cause many to give up the faith (Matthew 24:9-12).
3. Only those who endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13).
4. God in mercy sufficiently warns the sinner before destruction (Matthew 24:14).
5. Christ's prophetic words will surely be fulfilled (Matthew 24:34-35).
6. Christ's sudden return closes the door of opportunity for the Christ rejecters (Matthew 24:38-40).
7. The King will reward those who faithfully watch and work for Him (Matthew 24:42-47).
8. A firm belief in the Lord's imminent return is a strong deterrent to passiveness and earthly intoxication (Matthew 24:42, 48-51).
9. The Lord will pour out His judgment on those who are unprepared to meet Him (Matthew 24:48-51).
10. False leaders will show great signs and wonders to deceive (Matthew 24:23-24).
11. Only the Father knows the exact time of the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:36).

Summarizing the Lesson

None of us know what the future holds. But we do know who holds the future! And we can be glad that God has seen fit to give us some glimpses of end-time events. For those who are watching, awake and alert, the closer we are to our Lord's return—the greater our joy should be.

Research Guide

1. Comparing the Synoptic Gospels is again helpful in gaining a perspective of Jesus' total message.
2. Luke enlarges on the destruction of Jerusalem in a way that Mark and Matthew do not.