

**Lesson: Preparing for the Apocalypse:
Signs of the End Times**

**Freedom Way M.B.C.
Bible Study Lesson #667**

Date: _____

Biblical Passages

Matthew 24:3-14, 24:30-31, 24:36-44

Supporting Passages

Matthew 24:1-51, Mark 13:1-37, Luke 21:5-36

Memory Verse

Matthew 24:42

Biblical Truth

Jesus emphasized events related to the end times so that we can be ready for His return and not be caught off guard.

Content

As Jesus and His disciples left the Temple on another occasion, He predicted the destruction of the Temple and other signs of the end times. However, He cautioned them about trying to guess an exact time, instructing them instead to be ready at all times for His return.

Investigation

The disciples thought that Jesus' return would be soon. Their understanding of His coming, however, was faulty. They believed that He would set up an earthly kingdom and that this would happen immediately (Luke 19:11, Acts 1:6). Because of their mistaken expectations, the disciples did not understand Jesus when He spoke about the signs of the end times. Jesus talked about events that would happen soon as well as much later in the future. Generally, the events in the near future related to the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, which occurred in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Roman armies. The events occurring much later in the future (as yet unfulfilled) relate to Jesus' Second Coming and the end of the world.

Most likely on the Tuesday before His death the following Friday, as Jesus and His disciples left the Temple, one of the Twelve remarked about the magnificence of the Temple complex. In response, Jesus prophesied that all of the Temple stones would be torn down and all of Jerusalem would be destroyed (Matthew 24:1-2).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each recorded this discussion between Jesus and His disciples, often called the Olivet Discourse to encapsulate the events of tribulation leading to Christ's return. Jesus told the disciples not to be concerned with times and places but rather to be prepared for His coming.

Importance

This passage teaches that *The Future is in God's Hands*. This passage of Scripture is important because it provides learners with assurance that God is in control of Jesus' return—so they have no need to worry about it—and that they have much to do in proclaiming the gospel of Christ before He returns. Temple represented all that had to do with the past and God's old covenant. But God promised to raise up a new Temple among His people. God clearly holds the future.

Jesus is a real, historical figure who will redeem His people at His return. Therefore, this lesson also teaches that *Jesus is God and Savior*.

Interpretation

Matthew 24:3 Later, as they were on the Mount of Olives (just across the Kidron Valley from the Temple area), the disciples asked about the event Jesus had mentioned earlier (Matthew 24:1-2) when He explained that the Temple would be totally destroyed. They believed that this event would indicate the world was coming to an end and signal His coming. In asking about the "end of the age," the disciples wanted to know about the completion of God's plans and how He would coordinate everything to accomplish the fulfillment of His Kingdom.

Matthew 24:4-5 Jesus issued a warning not to be misled by false teachings about His return. Jesus then continued by giving His disciples a list of signs that would herald the end of time. First, He told them about a time of tribulation or great distress that would come. Jesus made no effort to give a timeline of the events. Rather, His purpose was to remind His disciples that all that was to come was part of God's plan and to be ready when the time arrived.

Jesus then told about an incredible deception that would take place. Jesus said that false teachers would come claiming to be the Christ or claiming to represent Him and claiming to come in His name. During this time of calamity, people would look for someone to give them direction and would ultimately be totally deceived.

Jesus warned even His closest followers of the possibility that such imposters could mislead them. Therefore, Jesus warned His disciples to "watch out" (v. 4) so that they would not be drawn in by these deceivers.

Matthew 24:6-8 As Jesus continued to give a list of the signs of the end times, He explained that there would be more "wars and rumors of wars" (v. 6) and predicted continuing conflicts between nations and people groups. In addition, natural disasters such as famines and earthquakes would continue to come on the earth. Yet Jesus told the disciples not to be "alarmed" about such events.

Jesus pointed out that these events would not be the final, end-of-time events themselves. They would simply indicate the beginning or the prelude of things that would come later. Just as an expectant mother does not give birth immediately when the pains of labor begin,

Jesus emphasized that more would come before the end arrived. Jesus did not want the disciples to get caught up in the coming events; instead, He wanted them to be ready for when they recognized these signs that pointed to the end.

Matthew 24:9-13 Jesus went on to tell about events that would happen with individuals, perhaps even among the disciples themselves. However, Jesus' words were for all of His followers, not just the disciples. He stressed that future believers would suffer persecution as well. The wording in verses nine and 10 suggests that many who claim to be believers will "turn away."

Jesus also told the disciples about other things that would happen as signs of the end, namely the increase of lawlessness and immorality will increase and the coming of many false prophets to deceive people. Yet in the midst of this distressing news, Jesus gave an encouragement to persevere, saying that "he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (v. 13). Those who walk in faith with Christ will stand firm to the end.

Matthew 24:14 Jesus gave a word of hope to the disciples: Despite the persecution that His church would face, the gospel would continue to be preached throughout the world. Indeed, history has recorded that persecution helped to present His gospel to the world (see Acts 8:1, 8:4 for one example).

Within this verse is both a reminder of God's love for people throughout the world and the explanation for the mission to take God's message to the Gentiles. God's message is to be taken to "all nations."

Matthew 24:30-31 Jesus described His return. When He returns, He will be recognized instantly—no one will speculate about whether He has come again. The phrase "they will see" likely refers to all people who will witness His coming, not just His followers. Jesus said that He would physically come from heaven on the clouds with "power and great glory" to earth, accompanied by angels who will "gather his elect." All who have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ are known as the "elect." In response to His coming, all people will "mourn" in despair and repentance.

At His coming, Christ will gather the elect, those who have chosen to accept His salvation, to Him. The elect will be gathered throughout the world. The phrase "from the four winds" describes the four points of the compass and represents the preaching of the gospel throughout the world.

Matthew 24:36-39 Jesus' purpose in this teaching was to prepare the disciples and all believers for the end times. The places and points of the Second Coming are not as important as the preparation. Because no one but the Father knows when it will happen, every person must make preparation.

To make His point, Jesus reminded His listeners of the story of Noah. In the time before the Flood, people seemed more concerned about eating, drinking, and marrying—normal

activities of life—than about the coming judgment of God. They did not focus on what God had commanded, but had more concern for their own pleasures. Jesus said that the same would be true when He, the “*Son of Man*” returns. People would continue their everyday business without any thought of His return—but it will be too late to change their decision then.

Matthew 24:40-42 Jesus emphasized the suddenness of His return with two illustrations. In the first, two people were tending a field, and one disappeared. In the second, two women were grinding a mill, and then one was suddenly gone. In both cases, the people who were described had some type of relationship. Yet what happened to them was based solely on their individual responses to Christ. Jesus can return at any moment, and the subsequent separation will be immediate and eternal.

Because only the Father knows the time, Jesus commanded His disciples to stay alert like a soldier on guard duty always looking out and being prepared.

Matthew 24:43-44 Jesus compared His coming to that of a thief. A thief's actions cannot be anticipated. If a homeowner knew when the thief was coming, he could have made special arrangements to prepare for him and to make his home safe. Jesus used this story to illustrate the need for staying alert to His coming. Just as a thief's coming is unexpected, Jesus' return will happen when people least expect it. Believers must always stay on guard, alert, and ready for His return.

Implications

Two thousand years after Christ ascended to heaven, He still has not returned to His people. Because of the delay, adults can often forget that His return is imminent. As a result, they can become complacent and neglect readying themselves for His coming. Hesitation to become involved with God's mission occurs when adults fear the specifics surrounding the end times. In this passage, however, Jesus notes that the specifics of the end are not necessary. One only needs to know that God holds the future and then continue to become involved with God's work as they wait for what the Father has in store.

Adults can too easily become so entrenched with the daily activities this world requires that they forget to make choices that will align them with God's mission to take the gospel to the nations. In addition, most questions about the end times remain unanswered. This realm of the unknown can create fear through which believers can stand frozen from committing any kind of energy toward an unknown outcome. However, with the outcome secure in God's promises and timing, adults can confidently commit themselves to His purposes. Adults should walk away from this lesson with a desire to seek purpose in God's mission and not waste the time that God has given them.

How do you keep a God-centered perspective on the end times?

How does knowing that God is in control of the end affect the way in which you view present hardships?

In what ways are persecuted Christ-followers a testimony to the gospel?

What can we do to be involved in Christ's work?

What is the biggest cause for you to use your time wisely for Christ?

FREE THOUGHT

“The interesting thing is that our brothers and sisters who are suffering aren’t asking us to pray that their suffering will end, but to pray that they will be faithful to Christ even in the midst of that suffering.” – Todd Nettleton