

20th Century Bible Course

Dear Student:

As you studied your last lesson no doubt you were impressed with the fact that the literal return of Christ to this world is one of the best-supported doctrines of Scripture. You have seen that Christ's coming is accompanied by tremendous events-the righteous dead are resurrected, and the faithful of all ages are taken to heaven with Jesus.

When will all this take place? We cannot know exactly, for the Bible says, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man" (**Matthew 24:36**). However, we can know when this grand event is near. Christ said that when we see "all these things" come to pass we will know that His return is near (**Matthew 24:33**). Just as a traveler knows by the landmarks that he is approaching his destination, so Christ has given us signs to indicate when we are nearing earth's climax.

Focusing on the future can be a frightening experience. Some people climb into the sand and refuse to look. Others seem irresistibly drawn and come away captivated by what they see. And they don't all see the same tomorrow. There are die-hard optimists who always see the graphs going *up*. Others see a picture framed in doom and come away absolutely certain that we are approaching the last night on earth. With which group do you identify?

THINGS ARE GETTING BETTER!

- ☐ We do have some problems, but nothing science and technology can't solve.
- ☐ I believe in evolution. Man is on the way up and I think he'll make it to the top.
- ☐ I think we're headed for the thousand years of peace the Bible tells us about.
- ☐ I have to be an optimist. Otherwise I couldn't carry on.

THINGS ARE GETTING WORSE!

- ☐ I think technology got us into our problems, so how can it get us out?
- ☐ We've already ruined our planet, and unfortunately it's the only one we have.
- ☐ Space travel may solve some problems, but not in time to help my generation.
- ☐ I think the end of the world is very near.
- ☐ People keep setting dates for the end of the world, but so far nothing has happened. I'm just not going to worry about it.
- ☐ It always makes me jittery when some psychic says that California is going to slip into the sea, or that we're all headed for doom. Some of them are right close to 75 percent of the time, and that makes me uneasy.
- ☐ I'd really like to know what the Bible says about it, so I can be prepared.

At the end of the lesson check these reactions again and see whether your existing convictions have been confirmed, shaken, or changed.

Peter exclaimed, "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" (**2 Peter 1:19**). Only in the prophecies of God's Word can we place our confidence and know that we will not be disappointed.

Most sincerely,
Your Bible Instructor

20th Century Bible Course

LESSON 5

TIME RUNNING OUT

SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 24 (NT 25, 26 [18, 19])

When the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, the temple was rebuilt. Five hundred years later it was reconstructed under Herod, and this was the temple of Christ's day. Although inferior to the magnificent temple built by Solomon centuries before, this newly rebuilt temple was the most sacred building on earth to the Jews and the pride of their nation. When Jesus predicted its utter destruction, you can imagine the antagonism and animosity that it stirred up among Christ's enemies. It even alarmed His own followers!

1. As soon as the disciples were alone with Christ, what did they ask showing that they linked the destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the world? Matthew 24:3

Apparently the disciples thought that the destruction of the temple and the end of the world would occur at the same time. In his reply Christ outlined events from that time until the second coming of Christ. Verses 6-12 list some of the signs that Jesus said would precede the fall of Jerusalem; verse 14 predicts the spread of the gospel by His followers. The disciples and the early church, under the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit, went forth to conquer the world for Christ. By A.D. 65 the then known civilized world had heard the good news of salvation through Christ. Paul said the gospel had been preached to *everyone* in his day (**Colossians 1:23**).

2. What sign did Jesus give that would indicate when the destruction of the city was at hand? Luke 21:20

The city of Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman armies in A.D. 66. After a period of time the army withdrew and the Christians, recognizing the sign given by Christ (Matthew 24:15-20) fled the city and did not return. In A.D. 69 the Romans returned, and destroyed the city in A.D. 70. Nearly a million people died or were sold into slavery at that time, but not a single Christian died. *They watched for the sign Christ had given and obeyed His instructions.* The temple was burned to the ground as Christ had foretold (even though the soldiers had orders not to destroy it). Christ foresaw the future and outlined it to His followers so that they could be saved.

3. How long did Christ say that Jerusalem would be trodden down? (verse 24)

Old Jerusalem and the temple site has been occupied largely by the Gentile nations until 1967 when the Jews took possession of it in a "lightning victory." This portion of Christ's prophecy was fulfilled in our day!

4. What did Jesus call the period of trouble that His people would experience after the fall of Jerusalem? Matthew 24:21

After Jerusalem's destruction the fires of persecution were kindled. Christians were driven from their homes and great numbers sealed their testimony with their blood. Noble and slave, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, were alike slain without mercy. These persecutions began under Nero and continued with greater or less fury for many centuries.

Part 1- SIGNS IN THE NATURAL WORLD

1. What three unusual sights in the heavens were foretold as signs of the end? (verses 29, 30). Compare with Joel 3:15 and Revelation 6:12-14.

The sun _____

The moon _____

The stars _____

These signs have already occurred. The famous Dark Day of May 19, 1780, when the sun was darkened with no astronomical explanation, and the evening moon became like blood, is described in the 1869 edition of *Webster's Dictionary*: "Dark Day, The. May 19, 1780-so called on account of a remarkable darkness on that day extending over all New England. . . . Birds sang their evening songs, disappeared and became silent; fowls went to roost; cattle sought the barnyard; and candles were lighted in the

houses. The obscuration began about ten o'clock in the morning, and continued till the middle of the next night, but with differences of degree and duration in different places. For several days previous the wind had been variable, but chiefly from the southwest and the northeast. The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not known."

The "falling" of the stars occurred on November 13, 1833. "The morning of November 13th, 1833, was rendered memorable by an exhibition of the phenomenon called shooting stars, which was probably more extensive and magnificent than any similar one hitherto recorded. . . . Probably no celestial phenomenon has ever occurred in this country, since its first settlement, which was viewed with so much admiration and delight by one class of spectators, or with so much astonishment and fear by another class. For some time after the occurrence, the 'meteoric phenomenon' was the principle topic of conversation in every circle" (*American Journal of Science and Arts*, Vol. XXV, 1834).

2. What would be the next event after these signs in the heavens? Mark 13: 26

Part 2--SIGNS IN THE POLITICAL WORLD

How does the Bible describe the spirit of war that will characterize the last days?

Revelation 11:18 "And the nations were _____."

Joel 3:9, 10 "Prepare _____, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; . . . Beat your plowshares into _____, and your pruninghooks into _____: let the weak say, _____."

Joel 2:30 "I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and _____."

The Hebrew word for this expression is *timroth*. The Hebrew lexicon defines it as "a column or pillar of smoke that spreads out at the top like a palm tree"! Ever hear of a "mushroom-like" cloud? God was not taken by surprise when man invented nuclear fission-He predicted it!

1 Thessalonians 5:3 "When they shall say, _____; then _____ cometh upon them."

Everyone wants peace; nobody wants war. Yet it seems that no sooner is one war under control when another breaks out. Ever try holding three beach balls under the water at once? That's the way it is with wars. Squelch one, and another bobs to the surface.

Part 3- SIGNS IN THE SOCIAL WORLD

1. List several characteristics of society in the last days. 2 Timothy 3:1-3,13 Men shall be _____ (verse 2). They shall also be (1) _____, (2) _____, (3) _____, (4) _____ to parents, (5) _____ without _____, (6) _____, (7) _____, (8) _____ etc. "Evil men and seducers shall wax _____" (verse 13).

Says Alvin Toffler, author of the best seller, *Future Shock*, "Conventional marriage may be dying, which is why homosexual daddies, group marriage and polygamy could be the wave of the future."

Sodom and Gomorrah and the world of Noah's time are examples of the condition that is to exist just prior to Christ's coming (**Matthew 24:37-39**). Both were destroyed because of their wickedness and immorality. One evangelist has said, "If God allows things to go on much longer as they are, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah." In many cities there are housing developments where gate passes are the only way of getting past armed watchmen at the entrances. People are afraid. Surely earthly inhumanity and wickedness have just about reached their limits!

There is no question about what God thinks of this mounting tide of permissiveness, pornography, and other kinds of filthiness in our age: "But fornication, and all unclean-ness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you. . . For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (**Ephesians 5:3-5**).

Part 4- SIGNS IN THE ECONOMIC WORLD

1. What picture of social unrest and economic injustice does James paint of the last days? **James 5:1-7**

Since the turn of the century we have seen mounting tension between capital and labor. Almost daily we read accounts of new strikes. Many are amassing wealth while millions are starving to death. Since the dispute between management and labor will not end until Jesus comes, the Christian is urged to be patient until that time (verse 8).

Part 5-SIGNS IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

1. List six outstanding signs in the religious world during the last days.

2 Timothy 3:4 "Lovers of _____

(verse 5) "Having
a _____ but denying
the _____

Luke 18:8 Lack of _____.

Matthew 24:12 Lack of _____.

2 Peter 3:3,4 "There shall come in the last days _____,
... saying, Where is the promise of _____?"

Revelation 14:6, 7 The "everlasting gospel" will be preached
to _____

The next event will be the second coming: "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle" (**Revelation 14:14**).

Part 6-- SIGNS IN THE SCIENTIFIC WORLD

1. In what graphic words did the ancient prophet Daniel depict today's runaway technology?

Daniel 12:4 "Many shall _____, and _____ shall
be _____" Prophecy is unfolding before our eyes as we see jets streaking across the
heavens. Mankind is surely running to and fro. Knowledge is increasing so rapidly that it doubles in less
than ten years-we can't even keep our textbooks up to date!

Why do you suppose God held back the discovery of nuclear fission, the piercing of outer space, the speed of jets and rockets, the tampering with the very secrets of life, until our present day? Why did God restrict us to the speed of Abraham and blind the minds of men to His secrets until this uncanny twentieth century? When we think it over, we can see that He could not have done otherwise. How could He permit men to discover the building blocks of His power, and tamper with the ignition of life itself, until He was about to return to this planet and say, "Ladies and gentlemen, it's closing time!" Do we need any stronger evidence that we are living on the very verge of His coming?

TIME IS RUNNING OUT! HOW CAN WE BE READY?

Do you still find it hard to believe that Christ could come in our day? It's so easy to say, "It can't happen here! It can't happen now!" But remember Pompeii- and Pearl Harbor- and the days of Noah! They thought it couldn't happen. They thought it *wouldn't* happen. But it did. And they were not ready.

Time is running out. Jesus is coming back- and soon. This jittery, explosive planet is literally wired for His return. But that doesn't need to be bad news. It need not panic the heart.

1. If we are prepared for Christ's return, what will be our attitude as we get closer to it? Luke 21:27, 28 _____.

Does that sound like bad news? Does it sound like doomsday? No! Jesus was the bearer of the

best possible news! He was talking about rescue from a doomed planet! He was talking about the solution of all our problems, if- *if we are ready*. That's the only important question. God is ready. This old worn-out planet is ready. But, are *we ready*? Everything is ready except the people, except you and me. Let us determine- in the strength of the Mighty One- to be ready for that day.

2. What warning did Jesus give so that we won't be caught by surprise when He comes? (verse 34) _____
3. What should we do so we may be accounted worthy to escape the things which will soon come upon the earth? (verse 36) _____

Thought questions:

- * Why do you think God gave us signs to indicate the nearness to Christ's second coming?
- * How do you feel about the events that are taking place today?
- * Is it your desire to be ready for Christ's coming?|