

THE TIME IS FULFILLED

- A. Introduction: Before Jesus returned to Heaven He warned that the period leading up to His second coming would be marked by religious deception—specifically false prophets and false messiahs. Because the return of Jesus draws nearer with each passing day, it is vitally important that we understand who Jesus is and why He came—according to the Bible—so we won’t be deceived. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 23-24
1. Jesus’ comments about false prophets and messiahs were part of an answer He gave to Peter, James, and John when they asked Him what sign would indicate that His return is near. Note that these men connected Jesus’ return with the end of this age. Matt 24:3—What will be the sign of your coming and of the end—that is, the completion, the consummation—of the age? (Amp)
 - a. Theologians have divided human history and God’s interaction with mankind on this earth into various periods (lessons for another day). It gets complicated and there is dispute over how to divide it up depending on the viewpoint of the particular theologian.
 - b. For the purposes of our discussion, I’d like to give you a layman’s definition of this present age. It is the time (or age) in which things are not as God intended them to be.
 1. God originally created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ, and He made the earth to be a wonderful home for His family. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18
 2. Sin has damaged both the family and the family home. When Adam sinned, a curse of death and corruption infused the human race and the earth. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12-19; Rom 8:20
 2. Shortly thereafter, God began to unveil His plan to redeem or deliver His creation from bondage to sin, corruption, and death and restore man and earth to what He always intended them to be through Jesus.
 - a. This plan is now in process and moving toward its ultimate end or completion. We are part of an unfolding plan that involves much more than just this present life and it includes many more people than just us.
 - b. Living with this awareness makes this present life easier to deal with because we know a good end is coming. All will be restored to what God originally intended.
 1. We are living in the last days or the end of this present age. The last days began when Jesus came to earth to die for our sins and open the way for sinful men and women to become sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ. Acts 2:17; II Tim 3:1; I John 2:18; etc.
 2. They will culminate with the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom on earth in connection with the second coming of Jesus.
 3. Jesus warned His followers not to be deceived. We are taking some time to look at what the Bible says about who Jesus is and why He came to earth. The Bible is the only fully accurate revelation of Jesus.
 - a. Jesus, the Living Word is revealed in and through the written Word, the Bible. God’s written Word is our protection against deception. It is the Truth and it reveals the Truth. John 14:6; John 17:17
 - b. The Bible is a record of God’s interaction with humanity as He works out His plan of redemption or salvation. II Tim 3:15
 1. Everything in the Bible was written by someone (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to someone about something.
 2. To properly interpret the meaning of scripture we must consider these three facts: Who wrote it? Who did they write to and why? What information did they intend to convey.
 - A. When the topic of the last days comes up, because it’s very hard for us not to think of it in terms we’ve learned from 20th century prophecy teachers, it becomes about: What does 666 mean? Is the rapture pre, mid, or post trib? Who is the Antichrist?
 - B. We need to back it up and consider the information about the last days in terms of what it meant to the people to whom Jesus first came—His original followers.

- B. At the time Jesus was born, the people of Israel had not had any prophetic revelation from God for four hundred years. However, just prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry a prophet known as John the Baptist came on the scene proclaiming: Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Matt 3:1-2
1. It was well known throughout the Judean hill country surrounding Jerusalem that highly unusual circumstances surrounded John's birth. Luke 1:65-66
 - a. His mother, an elderly barren woman, became pregnant with John following an angel's visit to her husband, Zechariah. Luke 1:5-25; 57-80
 - b. Zechariah lost the ability to speak until the day of the child's circumcision, when Zechariah began to prophesy about the Messiah and his own son John, saying:
 1. God has visited us to redeem us and He has raised up a mighty Savior just as He promise through His prophets long ago. Luke 1:68-70
 2. And you, son, will be the prophet of the most high. You will prepare his way and "tell people how to find salvation (NLT)" through the remission of their sins. v76-77
 2. Mark 1:14—When Jesus began His public ministry He had everyone's attention because He echoed John the Baptist's message by proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God.
 - a. Both of their audiences knew from the Old Testament prophets that when the Messiah comes He will establish the kingdom of God on earth. Consider these prophecies about the Messiah.
 1. Isa 9:6-7—These will be his royal titles: Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His ever expanding peaceful government will never end. He will rule forever from the throne of his ancestor David. (NLT)
 2. Dan 2:44—During the reign of those (earthly kings) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed; no one will ever conquer it. It will shatter all these kingdoms into nothingness, but it will stand forever. (NLT)
 - A. Both the Hebrew (Old Testament) word and the Greek (New Testament) word for kingdom carry the idea of dominion or reign, the exercise of kingly power. Matt 4:17—The reign of Heaven is near (Moffatt); Mark 1:15—The reign of God is near (Goodspeed).
 - B. Jesus first came to a nation of people who were looking for and expecting the Lord's Anointed, the Messiah, to come and establish the kingdom or reign of God on earth.
 - b. Consider these examples of real people (like you and me) who were just as interested in the "end times" as you and me. But they weren't looking for the Antichrist and the mark of the beast. They were looking for the Messiah and the kingdom of God to come to earth.
 1. Luke 2:25-35—When it came time for Mary's purification and her baby's dedication (forty days after the birth, according to the Law of Moses) the family went up to the Temple in Jerusalem. A devout man named Simeon was led to the Temple that day as well. God had promised him that he would not die until he saw the Lord's Christ.
 2. Luke 2:36-38—A prophetess named Anna, a widow for 84 years who devoted her life to fasting and prayer, she came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. "She talked about Jesus to everyone who had been waiting for the promised King to come and deliver Jerusalem" (v38, NLT).
 3. Jesus was asked when the kingdom would appear (Luke 17:20), and He dealt with people who thought that the kingdom of God would appear immediately (Luke 19:11).
 4. Luke 23:51—Joseph of Arimathea, who provided Jesus' tomb, waited for the kingdom of God.
 3. Mark 1:14-15—Jesus came proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. The Greek word translated gospel means good message or good news. Jesus had good news from God. What good news?
 - a. The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. v15—The [appointed period of] time is (completed) fulfilled (Amp); the time has come at last (J.B. Phillips). The kingdom or reign of God is about to be restored.

- b. Gen 1:26—God created men and women and gave us dominion. The Hebrew word translated dominion means to rule, have dominion, subjugate.
 - 1. Man was to be God's under ruler in the earth. We were meant to reign over the earth under God. We were meant to carry out God will on earth.
 - 2. That thought is expressed in what we call the Lord's prayer. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Matt 6:10
 - 3. Adam, through his sin, turned that God-given authority over to the devil who then became the god (or under ruler) of this world. Luke 4:6; II Cor 4:4; John 12:31; Luke 22:53; etc.
 - 4. Because of Adam's sin, humans are born into a fallen world and a kingdom of darkness that is presided over by the prince of the power of the air. (lessons for another day)
- c. Following Adam's sin, God came with good news. God began to reveal His plan to regain His family by breaking the devil's hold. Gen 3:15 is called the *protoevangel* or the first gospel.
 - 1. The Lord promised that the Seed (Jesus) of the woman (Mary) would undo the damage done by Adam's (and man in Adam) sin. The Seed will come by a virgin woman without a man's involvement. She would conceive a son by the power of the Holy Ghost. Luke 1:35
 - 2. The Seed will bruise the serpent's head (an eastern term meaning: destroy his power and lordship over mankind). Satan will bruise his heel. The devil will appear to triumph when he hatches his plan to crucify the Seed. But the Lord will beat him at his own game. Through death He will break the power of death. Heb 2:14-15
- d. With each generation, God gave increasing revelation of His plan. The gospel or good news was proclaimed to Abraham. Gal 3:8; Gen 12:1-3
 - 1. God called Abraham and revealed that the Seed would come through his descendants. That Seed is Christ. Gen 22:18; Gal 3:16
 - 2. Gen 15:6—Note that Abraham believed the good news and it was counted to him for righteousness (he was declared righteous). This is the first time the words believe and counted (or imputed) are used in Scriptures. This is significant. Jesus also said: Believe the gospel.
- 4. I Cor 2:7-8—God's unfolding plan was veiled in order to prevent the devil from recognizing His strategy. Consequently, the Old Testament prophets didn't see clearly that there would be two separate comings of the Messiah with two forms of the kingdom.
 - a. Luke 17:20-21—Jesus came the first time to establish the kingdom or reign of God in the hearts of men through the new birth. He came to make it possible for men and women to become sons and daughters of God through faith in Him.
 - 1. Jesus paid the price for sin at the Cross, so that when a person believes that good news and acknowledges Jesus as Savior and Lord, their sins can be remitted or wiped out. They are acquitted and declared righteous before God. Rom 4:22-5:1; Rom 10:9-10
 - 2. God can then treat them as if they never sinned and indwell them by His Spirit and life, making them literal sons and daughters of God through new birth. I John 5:1; John 1:12-13
 - b. Jesus came to break the power of the devil over man by paying for the sin that made us his captives. He came to bring us out of darkness into light, out of death into life. Col 1:13; Acts 26:18
 - 1. Jesus didn't come to earth to "make this world a better place". He came to root out its core problem: sin in the hearts of men. All the hell and heartache in the world springs from the wicked hearts of men and women. That can now be undone in individual hearts because the kingdom has come.
 - 2. Our number one charge now is to advance the reign of God in the hearts of men through new birth by proclaiming the gospel. (lessons for another day)
 - c. When Jesus comes again He will set up His eternal kingdom or reign as He takes control of the kingdoms of this world and roots out every remaining trace of sin, corruption, and death from this

world. Rev 11:15

- C. Christians sometimes misunderstand talk about God reigning and His kingdom coming to mean we can avoid life's challenges and hardships. There is no such as a problem-free life in this fallen world.
1. However, because of what Jesus has already done for us through the Cross, we can have victory in the midst of life's challenges.
 - a. Rom 5:17—Because we have received the gift of righteousness, we can reign in life through Jesus. To reign means to exercise dominion or authority.
 1. We have authority over devils and diseases. That was the calling card of the kingdom when Jesus went around proclaiming it. Matt 4:23-24; Matt 10:7-8; Luke 10:9; etc.
 2. The devil has no more authority over you. We have the same authority Jesus (in His humanity) exercised when He was on this earth. The devil's only power over you is deception—enticing you to believe lies about God, yourself, and your circumstances. (lessons for another day)
 - b. John 16:33—In this world we will have tribulation but we can be encouraged because Jesus has overcome it. That's a lesson for another day, but because the kingdom has come into us we are now more than conquerors through Jesus and we can make it through life's challenges in victory.
 - c. Rom 14:17—The kingdom of God in us is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.
 1. Righteousness is from a word that means rightness. Through the Cross and the new birth we are right with God. And, we are being made right in ourselves—spirit, soul, and body—by the power of the Holy Spirit. He who has begun a good work in us will complete it.
 2. Peace and joy are internal qualities (peace of mind and hope for the future). Those come from knowing that we are part of a plan that will be completed—and that the end result will be worth it all. Those come from knowing that God will get us through until He gets us out.
 2. Because the kingdom is in you, you are now in the kingdom in the sense that your citizenship is in Heaven. You are part of God's kingdom. You've been taken out from under the authority of Satan and have submitted yourself to the authority of God. God's provision is available to you in this life.
 - a. Matt 6:25-33—When Jesus told His followers that we don't have to worry about whether or not we will have the necessities of life, He said it in the context of the kingdom of God. If we seek first His kingdom and righteousness (if our priorities are right), then we'll have what we need to live this life.
 - b. Luke 12:31-32—Luke's account gives us another detail about what Jesus said. Fear not, little flock. It is your Father's delight to give you the provisions of the kingdom. God, who is now your Father, cares for you watchfully and affectionately—until the plan is completed and the visible kingdom comes.
- D. Conclusion: We have a lot more to say, but consider this statement made by the apostle Paul about God's plan. Paul was personally taught the gospel that he preached by Jesus Christ Himself. Gal 1:11-12
1. Paul understood that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, something that will have a good end. We need to remember that as the events of this last time play out around us.
 - a. Eph 1:9-10—God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. (NLT)
 - b. Eph 1:9-10—And this is in harmony with God's merciful purpose for the government of the world when the times are ripe for it—the purpose which He has cherished in His own mind of restoring the whole creation to find its one Head in Christ; Yes things in heaven and on earth, to find their one Head in Him. (Weymouth)
 2. Lots more next week!!