

## IS THIS THE TIME?

- A. Introduction: The return of Jesus to this world is fast approaching and, as the Bible predicts, increasingly perilous times are beginning to come on the earth (Matt 24:21; II Tim 3:1). In this series we've been examining what is happening and why, according to the Bible.
1. We're almost at the end of our study. We have a few more topics to discuss and some loose ends to tie up before we close our series. We began to do this last week and will continue for two more weeks. Accurate knowledge from the Bible will help us walk in peace, hope, and joy in the midst of the chaos.
  2. Acts 1:9-11—When Jesus returned to Heaven after His resurrection His first message to His followers was: I'll be back. Obviously, Jesus knew that He wasn't coming back within the lifetime of those people. But He wanted the fact that He will one day return to affect their perspective on life.
    - a. He wanted to help them live with the awareness that a plan with a good end is unfolding, and that because of this plan, they were part of something bigger than themselves. Here's the plan:
      1. God created human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ, and He made the earth to be a home for Himself and His family. Both the family and the family home have been damaged by sin. Eph 1:4-5; Isa 45:18; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; etc.
      2. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for sin at the Cross and open the way for men and women to be transformed from sinners into sons of God through faith in Him. He will come again to complete the plan by cleansing this world of all sin, corruption, and death. He will restore it to a fit forever home for God and His family. John 1:12-13; Rev 21:1-7; etc.
      3. When the Lord returns to earth, every person (since Adam and Eve) who has put faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ given in their generation will return to this world. They will be reunited with their body raised from the dead so that they can live on earth forever. Life will finally be what it was meant to be before sin. Job 19:25-26; I Cor 15:51-52; II Pet 3:13; etc.
    - b. This perspective helped those first Christians keep their priorities right and gave them hope in the midst of life's difficulties. They knew that this life with its hardships and pain is temporary, and any loss that they experienced because of the chaos will be restored in the life to come (Rom 8:18; II Cor 4:17-18; etc.). We need the same perspective so that we too can have hope.
  3. Matt 24:6-8—In this series we've made the point that Jesus gave some signs that will indicate His return is near. He compared some of those signs birth pains, meaning that they will increase in frequency and intensity as His return nears. The increasing chaos we're witnessing all around us is birth pangs.
    - a. It's not unusual to hear people dismiss the nearness of Jesus' coming with these statements: This is nothing new. There have always been wars and racial and ethnic strife. There have always been famines, disasters, and earthquakes. This chaos doesn't mean that Jesus is coming any time soon.
    - b. These people are absolutely correct about one thing—all these ills have been present since the earliest days of mankind. Adam's original sin produced a change in human nature and introduced corruption and death into this world. Since that time, fallen human nature and altered natural laws have expressed themselves through strife, wars, hunger, epidemics, and natural disasters.
    - c. How do we know that this increasing worldwide chaos is an indication that the birth pains signaling the Lord's soon return have begun? In this lesson we're going to address some of the reasons why we can say that the return of Jesus is near—according to the Bible.
- B. Before we get to specifics, we need to make this important point. A plan is underway—God's plan to have a family with whom He can live forever on earth. A plan by definition has a beginning, middle, and end.
1. This world the way it is isn't the way it's supposed to be because of sin—and isn't going to go on forever as it is: This world in its present form is passing away (I Cor 7:31, NIV).

- a. We made the point in earlier lessons that the first Christians understood from the writings of the Old Testament prophets that God is going to restore the earth to its pre-sin conditions, as a home for Himself and His family. Acts 3:21
- b. The apostle Paul wrote that God has now made know to us the mystery of His will or how He will accomplish this. He'll do it through Jesus.
  1. 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); He purposed in Himself...to bring **back again to their original state** all things in Christ, the things in heaven and the things on earth (Wuest).
  2. The Book of Revelation describes the completion of God's plan—He will reclaim what is His.
    - A. Rev 10:7—But when the seventh angel blows his trumpet, God's mysterious (secret) plan will be fulfilled. It will happen just as he announced it to his servants the prophets (NLT).
    - B. Rev 11:15—The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: The whole world has now become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever (NLT).
2. Peter, John, Andrew, and James (and the others) knew that Jesus' return to this world will mean a big change—the end of this present age. They asked Jesus: Tell us, what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end—that is the completion, the consummation—of the age (Matt 24:3, Amp)?
  - a. Every one of the writers of the epistles (Paul, Peter, John, James, and Jude) made reference to the last days (II Tim 3:1; Heb 1:2; James 5:3; I Pet 1:5; II Pet 3:3; I John 2:18; Jude 18). The Greek word last (*eschatos*) means farthest, final (it's used of place or time)—the last times of this age.
  - b. When Jesus came to earth the first time, through His death on the Cross, He activated the implementation of God's plan for a family. At that point, the last days or countdown to the completion of the plan began. Acts 2:17; Heb 1:2; I Pet 1:20; etc. (*eschatos* is the Greek word used)
    1. (Jesus) came once at the end of the age, to remove the power of sin forever by his sacrificial death for us (Heb 9:26, NLT). He will come again to bring full salvation (resurrection of the dead and restoration of the earth) to those who are waiting for and expecting Him (Heb 9:28).
    2. Jesus came at the right time in His first coming—when the proper time had fully come (Gal 4:4, Amp). The word translated fully (fullness in the KJV) means completion, to be replete, full up. Just as Jesus came at the right time the first time, He will come again at the right time.
  - c. There will come a point when it is time for Jesus to return. How do we know that time is near? When you understand that a plan is unfolding, you can reasonably conclude that there is an end on the horizon. It goes without saying that we are closer to His return today than we were yesterday.
3. And, as we pointed out last week, the Bible gives us much information about world conditions at the time the Lord returns. This information helps us recognize the times we're in. Consider these points.
  - a. The Bible describes a global system of government, economy, and religion in place prior to Jesus' return. It will be presided over by a Satan inspired and empowered man, with the capability of tracking and controlling all men. Dan 7:9-28; Dan 8:24-25; II Thess 2:3-4; II Thess 2:9; Rev 13:1-18
    1. The technology necessary for such a system has only become possible in the last few decades, due to the exponential technological advances. Thanks to satellite technology we now have, not only worldwide travel, but worldwide banking, communication, and tracking ability.
    2. People are becoming more and more open to worldwide order. In the last several decades there's been a marked shift in peoples' thinking toward globalism: We're a global community that must come together to face our shared challenges and merge our various belief systems. A world with no borders and no religious or philosophical differences will be a world of peace.
  - b. The Bible describes a final war prior to the Lord's return that is clearly a nuclear, chemical, and

biological holocaust. (We've discussed it in some detail in previous lessons).

1. Jesus said that if He doesn't intervene, every person on earth will be destroyed (Matt 24:21-22). In the Book of Revelation John describes a modern city destroyed in one day (Rev 18:2; 8).
  2. This kind of large scale catastrophic destruction was not possible until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - c. The Bible describes the nation of Israel as being present on earth when Jesus returns. Zech 14:1-4
    1. However, less than forty years after Jesus returned to Heaven, Rome crushed Israel when they rebelled against the Empire. Rome burned Jerusalem and ultimately removed the people from their land. Israel ceased to exist as a nation for almost two millennia.
    2. But in 1948 Israel reemerged as a nation with their identity and culture and religion still intact. And, Israel has taken center stage in world politics just as God predicted. Zech 12:1-3
  4. This is the first time since Jesus left this world two centuries ago that these circumstances have been in place. These developments make a strong case for the fact that we are entering the time of His return.
- C. Part of God's plan for a family includes putting down all rebellion throughout His creation. I Cor 15:24-25— Then comes the end, when he (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (ESV).
1. There is a rebellion underway in the universe. Before God created the heavens and the earth He created a host of angelic beings. At some point, one of them (Lucifer who became known as Satan) attempted to exalt himself above God. He rebelled and influenced a number of angels to follow him (many lessons for another time). Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:12-19; etc.
    - a. After God created Adam and Eve, Satan was able to entice the man and the woman to join him in rebellion against God. Adam, through his disobedience, surrendered his God-given authority to Satan and the devil became the god of this world. Luke 4:6; II Cor 4:4; John 12:31
    - b. Gen 10:8-10; Gen 11:1-4—Since that time Satan has sought to influence as many men as possible to follow and obey him rather than God. The result has been false religions, going back to the tower of Babel. (The Greek word translated Babylon in the New Testament comes from the Hebrew word for Babel. The term applied to both a city and an eventually to an empire.)
      1. A man named Nimrod established the kingdom of Babel (Babylon) and led a Satan-inspired rebellion against God. Nimrod attempted to unify men under his rule in a society independent of God by rebelling against God's command to fill the earth. Gen 1:28
        - A. The name Nimrod means let us rebel. Mighty hunter before the Lord literally means against the Lord. The Jewish Targum (an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) says that he not only hunted animals, he hunted men.
        - B. They built a tower out of sun dried brick and bitumen—not to reach heaven (those words aren't in the original Hebrew)—but to dedicate it unto the fallen angels (heavenly hosts).
      2. The tower was a historical reality (built around 2247 BC). We know from the historical record that many centuries later (605 BC) King Nebuchadnezzar repaired the tower and dedicated it to the sun (Bel). The Greek historian Herodotus saw the tower and wrote about it in 440 BC.
        - A. The city of Babylon became Nebuchadnezzar's capital. Ancient Babylon began to decay and eventually became a desert after Persia conquered the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC
        - B. We also know from historical and archeological records that all forms of idol worship originally came from the ancient religion of Babel (or Babylon). The gods and goddess of Egypt, India, Greece, Rome, etc. all have their roots in the gods of Babylon.
  2. The Book of Revelation makes a number of statements about Babylon. Babylon is actually the modern city that John saw utterly consumed by fire in a single day. Rev 14:8; Rev 16:19; Rev 18:2; 20- 22
    - a. Rev 17:5—The name Babylon is used figuratively one time in Revelation for the idolatrous spirit of Babel (the false religious system that developed in Nimrod's rebellion and then spread).

1. Babylon is called the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth—the mother of prostitutes [idolatresses] and of the filth and atrocities and abominations of the earth (Amp). Sexual sin was a major part of idolatry in the ancient world.
  2. Revelation describes the destruction of Babylon (both the city and the idolatrous system) at the return of Christ, stating that through her the nations were deceived. Rev 18:23-24
  - b. Satan will make one last effort to establish world government and religion under his control in an attempt to prevent Jesus' return to earth. He will do it through the man known as Antichrist. Anti means against or in place of. This man will be the ultimate false christ. Dan 7:23-25; Rev 19:19
    1. Scripture suggests that this final ruler will make a rebuilt Babylon his capital. This location is very close to the geographic center of earth's land masses (the site of ancient Babylon is fifty miles south of modern-day Baghdad.) False religion will once again center in Babylon.
    2. Satan will give this ruler power and receive worship through him. Men will accept the mark of this beast (this leader) as an act of worship. Rev 13:4; 12; Rev 14:9-10
  3. Although Satan was defeated at the Cross, he has not yet been subjugated (forced to submit to the rule of God's Law). When Jesus returns He will cleanse the world of idol worship and its related immorality and bring an end to the angelic rebellion that began before earth was created.
    - a. Jesus will destroy the counterfeit kingdom (political and religious) and remove the first rebel (the devil) from contact with Himself, His family, and the family home. Rev 19:20
    - b. Isaiah the prophet described the devil's future fate: You who destroyed the nations of the world... you will be brought down to the place of the dead, down to its lowest depths. Everyone there will stare at you and ask, 'Can this be the one who shook the earth and the kingdoms of this world? Is this the one who destroyed the world and made it into a wilderness?' (Isa 14:15-17, NLT).
- D. Conclusion: There has been a principle of lawlessness at work in the earth since that first rebellion began. Lawlessness is a rejection of authority. It is ultimately a rejection of Almighty God, the Supreme Authority.
1. The apostle Paul referred to the final ruler as "this man of lawlessness" (II Thess 2:3, Amp) and as "that Wicked" (II Thess 2:8). The Greek word Paul used in v3 suggests the idea of contempt of Divine Law. The term Wicked in v8 comes from a Greek word that means lawlessness.
    - a. Matt 24:12—It's interesting to note that one of the signs that Jesus said will indicate His return is near is increased iniquity or lawlessness. The Greek word used here is the same one that Paul used in II Thess 2:8. It means lawlessness.
    - b. This lawless man will find a lawless people who will welcome and embrace him when he comes on the world scene. Flagrant violations of the law and defiance of authority is skyrocketing worldwide as people increasingly abandon the idea of objective truth and standards of behavior.
    - c. Adding to this increasing lawlessness in the world is increasing hostility toward traditional religion and Judeo-Christian ethics, along with the idea that religion is a primary source of bigotry and war.
      1. In the western world this has resulted in the development of a false Christianity that denies biblical, orthodox tenants of Christian faith and morality.
      2. When Jesus gave signs that His return is near He said that false christs will abound, culminating in the world embracing the ultimate false christ as God (the final world ruler). Matt 24:4-5; Matt 24:15; II Thess 2:3-4
  2. The rise of lawlessness and the movement away from Judeo-Christian ethics and morality, along with the development of a false form of Christianity, are more indicators of where we are on the timeline of human history. Jesus is coming soon and we must learn how to deal with the increasing chaos around us. We'll finish this up next week!