

THE PLAN IS UNFOLDING

- A. Introduction: We are looking at the Second Coming of Jesus in terms of the overall plan of God in order to give us a framework with which to assess what we hear people say about it as well as to help us understand what's going on in the world. Understanding the plan will show us what we can expect in the years ahead.
1. God's been talking about the end since the beginning because He is unfolding His plan of redemption.
 - a. God created human beings to become His family through Jesus and made earth to be their home. When the first man sinned he brought sin and death into God's creation. God immediately began to unveil His plan of redemption with the promise of a coming Redeemer. Gen 3:15; Rev 13:8
 - b. Redemption is His plan to deliver both men and the earth from bondage to sin, Satan, corruption and death. The goal of redemption is transformation: to turn unholy, unrighteous sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God and to make the earth a fit forever home for His family.
 1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay the price for sin so it can be removed and God can then make those who put faith in Christ into sons and daughters through a new birth.
 2. Jesus will come again to complete the plan of redemption by cleansing the earth of all sin, corruption and death. He will then establish His visible kingdom on earth and God will live with His redeemed family forever. That's what the Second Coming is all about.
 2. God marked out the people group through whom the Redeemer (Jesus) came to earth (the descendants of Abraham, Israel) and charged them with the task of compiling, recording and preserving His written record, the scriptures. Gen 12:3; Rom 3:2
 - a. God gave them two remarkable timelines as to when He will set up His kingdom on earth. God revealed that four empires would rule over Israel but, in the time of the fourth empire, He will establish His kingdom (Dan 2:44,45). God also said that He would deal with Israel for 490 years for their sin of idol worship and then establish His kingdom on earth (Dan 9:24-27).
 - b. We discussed in previous lessons how both of these timelines can be counted out in the historical record. By the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Israel was looking for Him because the fourth empire (Rome) was in place and almost 483 years had passed since Daniel's countdown began.
 - c. While Jesus was on earth He revealed that there would be two comings of the Redeemer and that His kingdom would take two forms, first the reign of God in the hearts of men through the new birth and then His visible kingdom established on earth. Luke 17:20,21
 1. When Jesus went back to Heaven His first message to His disciples was: I will come again. They went out and preached the resurrection of Jesus, the remission or wiping out of sins, and the return of Jesus to complete the plan of redemption. Acts 1:11; Acts 3:14-15; 19-21
 2. Eagerly expecting the soon return of Jesus is a major New Testament theme. Every epistle except Galatians, Philemon, II and III John makes reference to Jesus' Second Coming.
 3. After Jesus went back to Heaven His disciples were given more information about His Second Coming and kingdom, receiving additional insight as to how the transformation of men and the earth will occur.
 - a. The Old Testament prophets had revealed that God will make this world new. Through Peter it was revealed that God will accomplish this by speaking His Word which will loose the atoms that make up the earth from their bondage to corruption and death. Isa 65:17; Jer 23:29; II Pet 3:10-13
 - b. The Old Testament prophets also wrote that only the righteous can enter God's kingdom on earth. It was revealed to Paul exactly how men and women are made righteous. Ps 15:1,2; Ps 24:3,4
 1. God Himself becomes our righteousness when we are born again. Through the new birth we are united to the uncreated, eternal life in Jesus. John 15:5; I Cor 1:30; 6:17; II Cor 5:21; etc.
 2. God also revealed to Paul that He'll make our bodies like Jesus' resurrection body, free from corruption and death, perfectly suited for life on the new earth. Phil 3:20,21; I Cor 15:51-53
 - c. Additionally, it was shown to Paul that there will be two stages or phases to the Lord's Second Coming, each one with specific and different purposes.
 1. Jesus will first come in the clouds FOR His people. Believers will be caught up to meet Him

in the air and be taken back to Heaven (I Thess 4:13-18). Seven years later Jesus will come to earth WITH His saints to cleanse the earth and establish His kingdom (Jude 14,15).

2. The seven year period between these two stages is commonly known as the tribulation based on a statement Jesus made. Matt 24:21
 - d. Finally, John was given the information recorded in the Book of Revelation. His original readers, who were familiar with Daniel's book, would have understood that John was describing events that will occur in the seven years immediately preceding Jesus' return. Dan 9:27
 1. John saw the fourth kingdom and its final ruler. Daniel had introduced both, revealing that this man will challenge God's right to rule, set up his own lawless system, and cause great chaos and destruction (Dan 7:21-25; 8:23-25). John was given additional details about it all.
 2. John revealed that this ruler will establish a world government, economy and religion prior to the Lord's return (Rev 13), but that he and his kingdom will be destroyed by Jesus (Rev 19).
 3. The Book of Revelation ends with the plan of redemption completed -- God coming to live with His redeemed family on the new earth. Rev 21,22
 4. We could whole lessons on each point above. But our goal is to give an overview not a detailed study.
 - a. We need to see that a plan is unfolding and that there are many more people involved in and concerned with Jesus' return than just we who live right now.
 1. Although we have more details about it than any of them had in their lifetimes, our interpretation of Jesus' return has to be consistent with their understanding of it.
 2. We also need to recognize that all these people were looking for the Redeemer, not the Antichrist and the mark of the Beast. And they were not afraid of what was coming because they knew that they would have a part in God's eternal kingdom on earth.
 - b. What was not revealed to them was the fact that the completion of the plan (and those last seven years) was two thousand years away. No one knew that Israel would cease to exist as a nation in 70 A.D. or that the fourth empire (Rome) would come to an end in 476 A.D.
 1. We know a lot about world conditions at the time of the Lord's coming from what the prophets wrote. According to Daniel and John both Israel and Rome will be involved in those final seven years. Israel's reemergence as a nation (1948) indicates the stage is now being set.
 2. Rome was portrayed as legs, feet and toes in the statue in Dan 2. Daniel described this empire as a beast with ten horns or kingdoms in Chapter 7. John saw the same thing in his vision.
 - A. We can look back in history and see that Rome divided into two parts in 395 A.D.(east and west) but it has never existed in the form of ten kingdoms.
 - B. These prophecies indicate that a revived form of this empire will reemerge as ten units of some sort. What and where will be clear when it happens. But that day is approaching
- B. Jesus said that in the years immediately preceding His return there will be such trouble and distress that if He did not return at that point, everyone on earth would die. Why will there be such destruction?
1. Much of the chaos and destruction during the final seven years will be the result of Satan's increased activity. He knows his time is short and will act with great wrath. Rev 12:12
 - a. In eternity past, God the King created angels to worship and serve Him (Ps 103:20-21). The archangel Lucifer challenged God's right to rule and lured one third of the angels to join him in rebellion, setting up his own counterfeit kingdom ((Ezek 28:1-19; Isa 14:12-14; Rev 12:3-4,9).
 1. After God created Adam and Eve, Lucifer (Satan) enticed them to join him in rebellion to the rightful King. Satan's kingdom which had only existed in the heavenlies was established on earth. Adam, and mankind in Adam, became subjects of the kingdom of Satan. Luke 4:6
 2. Gen 3:15--It was at this point that God promised the coming of One who will break the devil's power, execute judgment on him, and restore submission to God the rightful King.
 3. Satan was judged at the Cross but has not yet been subjugated. Jesus is coming back to end this original rebellion and bring all things under the rule of His Father. Satan will be forever

removed from contact with God's family and home. I Cor 15:24-28; Rev 20:10

- b. Satan will not go quietly In these seven years he will offer the world a ruler, his counterfeit of Christ. This man will seem to have answers to the world's problems and offer a false peace.

Millions will flock to him, willingly submitting to his rulership.

1. Through this man Satan will entice the world to worship and submit to him and help him hold on to his kingdom on earth by preventing the Lord's return. Rev 19:19

2. The actions of this Satan-inspired man of sin, this son of perdition or destruction (II Thess 2:3), and the responses of the people of earth to him will cause much of the destruction of the that occurs in these years. Through peace he will destroy many. Dan 8:25

- c. Satan tried to stop the coming of Jesus the first time (Matt 2:16). He has tried many times in the past to work through a man to take over the world and set up a world religion and government (Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin). But he has been restrained until the time of the end.

1. When believers are taken to Heaven at the catching away the Holy Spirit's ministry will change. The restraint He exercised over evil through the Church will cease. II Thess 2:5-8

2. Then, the wickedness in Satan and in human hearts will be demonstrated as never before. Millions will suffer and die. The Book of Revelation gives graphic descriptions of it.

- d. We have a tendency to view all this as a kind science fiction event. But the conditions described by Daniel and John won't be freaky. They will be the natural culmination of a progression of events leading up to those final years.

1. Although believers in Jesus will not be here during the final seven years (Paul revealed that they can't begin till we are gone. II Thess 2:3), we are seeing and will continue to see conditions set up which will pave the way for this final ruler and his kingdom.

2. It will affect our lives in "not good" ways. If you lived in Nazi Germany when Hitler was coming to power you would have been affected by the changes he brought to German society.

3. We don't need to fear or freak out. We need to understand what is happening and how to deal with it according to God's Word.

2. Jesus said that one sign His return is near will be an abundance of sin (Matt 24:12). Paul said that the days before Christ's return will be perilous (or fierce) because of people's behavior (II Tim 3:1-4).

a. Moral standards will not suddenly change when the Church is taken off the earth. The decline is well underway. It's part of birth pangs that will increase in intensity and frequency (Matt 24:4-8).

b. Sin has plagued humanity since the fall of Adam. All humans are born with a sin nature and do what comes naturally, namely sin. That's why new birth which produces a new nature is needed.

1. But there are more people living on the earth now than have lived throughout all of history combined. More people means more fallenness and sin.

2. Sin has a cumulative effect (I Cor 5:6). Because of technological developments (TV, movies, internet, international travel, etc.) sin can go farther than ever and the effects of sin can reach more people, resulting in ever-increasing damage.

3. Until the end of the last century most cultures in the modern world adhered to Judeo-Christian ethics, even if they were non-religious. The counterculture movement of the 60s eroded this influence, removing much of the external cultural restraint on the wickedness in human hearts.

- c. Willful, persistent sin deceives and hardens men to the truth, producing a reprobate mind, a mind unable to make decisions in its own best interests. We see it all around us. Heb 3:13; Rom 1:28

3. A hallmark of the years prior to Jesus' return will be massive religious deception. Matt 24:4,11,24

a. I Tim 4:1-3--Paul said men will depart from the faith, listening to seducing spirits and giving their minds to doctrines inspired by devils. They will hinder marriage and refuse meat. It's interesting to note that marriage is being redefined worldwide and a worldwide vegan movement is underway.

1. In II Tim 3:5 Paul wrote: They will maintain a façade of "religion" (Phillips) but they will reject the power that could make them godly (NLT).

2. We live in a time when people profess spiritually but live in gross immorality (even in the

Church) claiming that God's not mad at anyone anymore. Yes, God poured out His wrath against sin at the Cross. But He did it to deliver us from sin, not to make it okay to sin.

b. Both Peter and Jude wrote that before the Lord's return men will turn the grace of God into lasciviousness (wantonness, lewdness) and deny the Lord who bought them. II Pet 2:1-3; Jude 4

1. God's grace has been turned into a justification for sin. Sin has been redefined as a mistake. If there is no sin then we don't need a Savior nor do we have to give account to Him.

2. Many so called "Christian" churches now say all paths lead to God who is all inclusive. The gospel has been reduced to feeding the poor and working to end corporate greed and war.

c. An apostate church that will welcome Satan's counterfeit of Jesus is in the process of forming.

1. Apostasy is a renunciation of faith, an abandonment of previous loyalty. This church is in the process of abandoning the basic doctrines of the Christian faith as well as the Savior.

2. It has a form of godliness but denies the power of God as it redefines who Jesus is, what He came to do, and what sin is and isn't.

4. We are going to be increasingly bothered by what they see going on in society and the Church. That's one reason why it's important to understand the times in which we live.

a. In the context of discussing the behavior of men prior to the Lord's return, Peter stated that righteous Lot was vexed by the behavior of the inhabitants of Sodom. II Pet 2:7,8

b. We can't stop what's coming; we can only ride it out. God will deliver us as He delivered Lot. We're not here to fix society, we're here to show Jesus to people around us so they can be saved.

C. Conclusion: A plan with a beginning, middle and end is unfolding. We live at the end of the plan. Our place in time brings with it its own unique challenges. We need to understand the times in which we live, be on guard against deception, and cling to the Word of God.

1. Peter, Paul, and Jude all gave specific instructions as to how we should face the days ahead.

a. Jude instructed his readers: v(18)20-23--Build up your characters on the foundation of your most holy faith (20th Cent); Stay always within the boundaries where the love of God can reach and bless you (Living Bible); Have mercy on the waverers (Moffatt) and save some, snatching them out of the fire (ASV) while you hate the very clothing polluted by their touch (20th Cent).

b. Paul told his readers: II Tim 3:13-15--Evil men and deceivers will get worse and worse but you continue in the Word of God which will make you wise unto salvation.

c. Peter reminded His readers that God keeps His Word. Don't let the passage of time lull you into thinking that He won't return. This passage of time gives more opportunity for men and women to become sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus. II Pet 3:1-9

2. In discussing the period leading up to His Second Coming Jesus gave specific instructions to His followers: Don't be deceived or afraid. Be elated in joyous expectation (Matt 24:4; Luke 21:9,28).

God's Word is our protection against deception. His Word gives us reasons why we need not fear. And it shows us why we can be elated in joyous expectation. More next week!