

LOOKING FOR JESUS

- A. Introduction: We are working on a series about the second coming of Jesus. The second coming is not a side issue or an isolated event stuck at the end of the Bible in a freaky book called Revelation.
1. Jesus' second coming is a vital part of the gospel or good news of salvation through faith in Him. The second coming is the culmination of God's plan for humanity. Jesus is coming back to complete God's plan to have a family with whom He can live forever on this earth.
 - a. Jesus came to earth the first time to die as a sacrifice for sin so that sinners can be transformed into sons and daughters of God through faith in Him. He'll come again to restore earth to a fit forever home for God's family by cleansing it of all sin, corruption, and death. John 1:12-13; Rev 21-22
 - b. Jesus' first message to His followers once He returned to Heaven was: I'll be back (Acts 1:9-11). The first Christians lived with eager anticipation of His return. Note these two statements.
 1. I Cor 1:7-8—Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you strong right up to the end, and he will keep you free from all blame on the great day when our Lord Jesus Christ **returns** (NLT).
 2. Titus 2:13—We are filled with hope, as we wait for the glorious **return** of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (CEV).
 - c. Note the highlighted word **return**. The Greek word translated return in I Cor 1:7-8 is *apokalupsis*. It means to take the cover off of, reveal, bring to light. The word used in Titus 2:13 (*epiphaneia*) means a shining forth, a manifestation, an appearance. These two words are synonyms.
 1. We get our English word apocalypse from this Greek word. In popular culture, apocalypse has come to mean the cataclysmic destruction at the end of the world.
 2. But in the Bible, the word is used for the uncovering, the full disclosure or revelation of God's plan through Jesus. Note how it's translated in Rev 1:1—This is the revelation of Jesus Christ.
 2. The second coming is supposed to be a source of hope and excitement for Jesus' followers, not fear and confusion. But, many people, who shouldn't be, are confused or afraid—for several reasons.
 - a. Second coming is a broad term for a number of events that occur over a period of time. People tend to focus on individual events and miss the big picture—the completion of God's plan for a family. And, if you don't see the big picture, some of the individual events can be frightening.
 - b. The Bible gives few or incomplete details about many of the specific events. People have a tendency to speculate about things that are not yet fully revealed. Or they try to find specific current events in the Bible and end up drawing wrong conclusions.
- B. We're considering Jesus' return from the standpoint of what it meant to the first Christians, people who interacted with Him (eyewitnesses) and were looking forward to His return. We have more to say tonight.
1. When Jesus came to this world the first time, He was born into 1st century Israel, a people group whose view of reality was shaped by the Old Testament prophets. Most of Jesus' first earliest were Jewish.
 - a. Based on the writing of the prophets, they knew that the Lord will one day restore this world to pre-sin conditions, establish His kingdom on earth, and live with His people forever (big picture).
 1. The prophet Daniel was the first to write about a Messiah (or Anointed One) who will bring in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24-27). The Hebrew word Daniel used for righteousness means to be right. His readers understood that the Lord is coming to earth to make things right.
 2. The prophets, including Daniel, predicted that a time of great tribulation will precede the Lord's coming to restore the world. But they also wrote that God's people will be delivered from this tribulation. Joel 2:28-32; Dan 12:1-2
 - b. The prophets did not clearly see the two comings of the Messiah—first as the final sacrifice for sin and then as the conquering king who restores the world. Greater understanding of God's plan to

- deliver His people (more details) came through Jesus and the information He gave to His apostles.
2. To understand what will happen prior to the Lord's return we first need to know that there is a counterfeit kingdom in this world, presided over by Satan (Luke 4:6; John 12:31; II Cor 4:4; I John 5:19; etc.). Jesus is coming back to remove this usurper and destroy his kingdom. (See lesson #1185 for details).
 - a. Just before the Lord returns, Satan will offer the world a false Messiah, an anti or in place of Christ, in an attempt to prevent Jesus, the rightful King, from taking control of the earth. This man will be inspired and empowered by Satan. II Thess 2:9
 1. For a period of time, the world will embrace this false Christ as God, reject the true Creator and Savior, and abandon Christian doctrine as well as Judeo-Christian ethics and morality, in favor of doctrines (teachings) from devils. I Tim 4:1
 2. Rom 1:18-32—When people willfully reject their Creator, it leads to a downward spiral of increasingly debased behavior that results in reprobate minds. A reprobate mind is a one that is unable to make decisions in its own best interests.
 - b. This ultimate false Christ will preside over a worldwide system of government, economy, and religion. The actions of this man and the responses of the world to him will produce the chaos and tribulation of the final years leading up to Jesus' return. Rev 6:1-15; Rev 13:1-18
 1. This time of tribulation is called the wrath of the Lamb, not because Jesus causes the trouble, but because God wants it clearly understood that the calamity earth experiences at this time is a direct consequence of their rejection of Him and acceptance of a false Christ. Rev 6:16-17
 2. Wrath is not God's emotional response to sin. Wrath is used as a figure of speech in the Bible to mean an administration of justice. When God judges people in this life He gives them over to the consequences (effects) of their choices. Rom 1:24; 26; 28
 3. Recently, we've been examining some things Paul wrote in two letters written to Christians living in the Greek city of Thessalonica. From these epistles we learn that part of the good news (gospel) Paul preached included the fact that Christians are delivered from the wrath to come. I Thess 1:9-10
 - a. By this Paul meant that because believers are justified—declared not guilty and brought into right relationship with God through the blood of Christ when they accept Him and His sacrifice—they will never experience wrath, the just punishment for sin—eternal separation from God. John 3:36
 1. Paul also taught the Thessalonians that Christians are delivered from the wrath associated with the Day of the Lord, a term the Old Testament prophets used for to the time of tribulation and chaos that will precede the Lord's arrival to set up His kingdom and restore earth. I Thess 5:9
 2. Jesus revealed to Paul that before the Day of the Lord begins, Jesus will take believers off earth and back to Heaven. At that time their bodies, along with all those who belong to Jesus, will be made immortal and incorruptible. I Thess 4:13-18; I Cor 15:51-52; Phil 3:20-21
 - b. Paul wrote a second letter to the Thessalonians when he received word that someone was telling them that the Day of the Lord had already begun. They were upset by that information because, based on what Paul taught them, they expected to be taken off the earth prior to the Day of the Lord.
 1. Paul reassured them that the Lord will gather believers to Himself just as He promised (John 14:1-3), and reminded them that two identifiable events will occur before the Day of the Lord.
 2. Paul wrote that there will be a great departure from (rebellion against) the Lord and the man of lawlessness (sin) who brings great destruction will be revealed (*apokalupsis*). II Thess 2:1-3
- Daniel the prophet was the first to write about this final world ruler. In a series of visions given to him, God showed Daniel how the kingdoms of this world will rise and fall—down to the final kingdom and its ruler—and eventually become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. Rev 11:15
- a. Daniel actually says more about the man we know as Antichrist than he does about the Messiah. He wrote the following about the leader of the global system that will be in place when Jesus returns.
 1. Dan 8:23-25—At the end...a fierce king, master of intrigue, will rise to power. He will

become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause a shocking amount of destruction and succeed in everything he does. He will destroy powerful leaders and devastate the holy people. He will be a master of deception, defeating many by catching them off guard. Without warning he will destroy them. He will even take on the Prince of princes in battle, but he will be broken, though not by human power (NLT).

2. Dan 9:27—He will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. Then, as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the end that has been decreed is poured out on this defiler (NLT).

b. A detailed study of the Book of Daniel requires its own series. And, our purpose in this series is not to do an in depth study of all the individual events and people that come under the umbrella of the term second coming. I'm emphasizing the big picture and the end result. But the passages I just cited from Daniel bring up some issues that need to be addressed before we move on.

1. The Bible makes it clear that many people will come to saving knowledge of Jesus after believers in Jesus are caught up to Heaven. But they will face severe persecution from this wicked final ruler, and many will be martyred for their faith in Christ.

A. Daniel wrote that this man will stop sacrifices and offerings from being made. This is a clear indication that a rebuilt Temple will stand in Jerusalem before the Lord's return.

B. Daniel also wrote that this man will set up a sacrilegious object that desecrates. The Hebrew reads an abomination of desolation, a term indicating something very offensive that defiles something holy.

2. Paul defined the desolation in his letter to the Thessalonians: He (the final ruler) will exalt himself and defy every god there is and tear down every object of worship. He will position himself in the temple of God claiming that he himself is God (II Thess 2:4, NLT).

A. Jesus mentioned Daniel's statement when He gave His apostles signs that will indicate His return is near at hand: The time will come when you will see the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing in the holy place (Matt 24:15, NLT).

B. Those who come to faith in Christ in this terrible time (including many Jews) will be viciously pursued and persecuted by this final ruler. Note that in His warning Jesus provides instructions that will help them escape and survive. Matt 24:16-21

3. God gave Daniel information about both the near future and the far future (the end of this age).

A. Many of his prophecies have already been fulfilled. They are so exact that the only way critics can explain them is to say that the prophecies were written after the fact.

B. For example, in 551 BC Daniel predicted the sudden rise of the Greek empire (by name) and its division into four empires, two hundred years before those events took place. Dan 8

5. Back to Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. The apostle gave two more important facts about the final world ruler, whom he called the man of lawlessness.

a. One, right now, there's a restraint on this man being revealed (it's not time yet). Paul reminded them that he "can only be revealed when his time comes. For this lawlessness is already at work secretly, and it will remain secret until the one who is holding it steps back (II Thess 2:6-7, NLT).

1. It's not fully clear what Paul meant by this restraint, other than it's a "he". So, today, there is some disagreement about the exact meaning. Some say it means that when believers are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, the moral restraint that they exercise in society through their behavior will be removed, along with the influence of the Holy Spirit in and through them.

2. Since God the Holy Spirit is everywhere, He will still be here when believers leave. Others say that Paul meant the Holy Spirit's ministry will somehow change in these final years of history.

b. Second, and the main point for our study, is that Paul pointed them to the end result: You won't be here when this man is revealed to the world, Jesus triumphs over him in the end.

1. II Thess 2:8—Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming (NLT).
2. There's nothing in this or any other letters written by Paul or the other apostles about trying to figure out who this final ruler is or protecting yourself from accidentally taking his mark.
3. The second coming is about Jesus, and we should be looking for Him—not the Antichrist.

- C. Conclusion: God has been talking about the end since the beginning, because He is working out a plan to renew this world and then live with His family forever. Jesus will complete this plan when He returns.
1. Right after Adam sinned and took the entire human race into the pignep of sin, corruption, and death, the Lord promised that through the coming Seed (Jesus) of the woman (Mary), Satan's hold on the world will be broken. Gen 3:15
 - a. When Jesus returns, the unlawful ruler (Satan) and his counterfeit kingdom in this fallen world will be forever banished from contact with God's family and the family home. Rev 19:20; Rev 20:10
 - b. Isaiah the prophet was shown the final fate of Satan: How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star (Lucifer), son of the morning! You who destroyed the nations of the world...Everyone...will stare at you and ask, 'Can this be the one who shook the earth and the kingdoms of the world? Is this the one who destroyed the world and made it into a wilderness' (Isa 14:12-17, NLT)
 2. We're in the season of the Lord's return and will face increasingly challenging times as the conditions described in the Bible set up. How do we know that we are in the season of Jesus' return? There are many answers to this question. Consider two that relate to the false final ruler and a worldwide system.
 - a. A worldwide system presided over by a tyrant leader with full control over the world's population has only been technologically possible recently, and the world is primed for a God-like leader. b.
 - b. In recent years there's been an unprecedented abandonment of Christianity in formerly Christian nations, including our own (see recent Pew and Barna Research surveys for documentation). With that has come a rejection of Judeo-Christian ethics and morality as a restraining force in society.
 3. Our country is experiencing radical changes. Our system of government works only when the governed are governed by moral principles. People who exercise personal self-restraint don't need harsh government control. As the U.S. abandons Judeo-Christian values, we're seeing increased lawlessness.
 - a. If we are at the time of the end of God's plan (and it's clear that we are), no amount of prayer or fasting can stop what's coming on the earth. If it's time to complete God's plan, then it's time.
- Timing was involved in Jesus' first coming and timing is involved in His second coming.
1. Rom 5:6—When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners (NLT); Gal 4:4—But when the right time came, God sent his Son...to buy us freedom ...so that he could adopt us as his very own children (NLT).
 2. 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...in heaven and on earth (NLT).
 - b. The U.S. is about to hold elections that many hope will change the course our country is on. Our hope is not in political leaders. Our hope is in Jesus. Even if your candidate wins, and there is some improvement, it's only temporary. I'm not saying don't vote; I'm saying recognize the times.
 - c. How should we pray? Ask God to raise up laborers who can share the gospel with those around them, and ask Him to use to chaos of these final years of human history to wake people up to the reality of eternity and their need for a Savior. Matt 9:36-38
4. The best thing you can do for yourself and your family as we face the challenges ahead is to build your trust and confidence in the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, by reading the clearest revelation we have of Him: the documents in the New Testament, written by men who walked and talked. They witnessed His first coming and heard Him promise to return to complete the plan. Much more next week!