



SIGNS OF THE END

Course 1, *Basic Christianity*, Lesson 8

The Problem: We discovered in Lesson 7 that Bible prophets predicted the end of our world. Jesus Himself promised that He would come back to earth again and take His faithful people to heaven. But how can we know that the end of all things is near? Does the Bible give us signs to look for, indicating when Jesus is about to return?

The Bible provides extensive insight into the second coming of Christ, an event that will mark the culmination of this world. We are not left in uncertainty regarding the signs that indicate its nearness. Scripture contains numerous passages describing the conditions of the world leading up to Jesus' return, as well as detailed prophecies about the actions of earthly powers operating until the end of time. By carefully studying the fulfillment of these prophecies, we can discern the approach of this great and momentous event, as foretold in God's Word.

Throughout history, faithful Christians in every age since Jesus' ascension have anticipated the imminent return of Christ and the end of the world. Church history reveals numerous examples of devoted believers and theologians who firmly believed that Christ would come either in their lifetime or shortly thereafter. In the second century, the Montanists proclaimed that the heavenly Jerusalem would soon descend near Pepuza in Phrygia. Similarly, Hippolytus in the third century and Lactantius in the early fourth century predicted that Christ's return was near. Moving forward, Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century anticipated Christ's return sometime between 1700 and 1734. In the nineteenth century, William Miller predicted that Christ would come in 1844. These instances highlight humanity's enduring longing for the fulfillment of God's promise and the hope of Christ's return.

How can we confidently believe, based on our study of Bible prophecy, that Jesus' return is near, even though previous interpreters were mistaken in their conclusions? What evidence can we uncover that affirms the accuracy of our interpretations today?

Objectives:

First, what are the signs in the political world?

Second, do social conditions reveal the nearness of Jesus' coming?

Third, what will economic conditions be like just before Jesus comes?

Fourth, does God warn us of the end through events in nature?

Fifth, what will be the religious condition of our world just before Christ's second advent?

Sixth, how do we prepare for the Lord's return?

I. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS IN THE POLITICAL WORLD?

What political events does Scripture predict will unfold in the time leading up to the second coming of Jesus? Are these events more reflective of our current era than any other period in human history?

The Word:

1. What did Jesus say would be the relationship between the nations just prior to His second coming?

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. Matthew 24:6-7; See also Mark 1:7-8.

2. What did the Apostle John say would be the attitude of the nations shortly before the end?

The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.” Revelation 11:18

3. With whom will the nations finally be at war?

The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” Revelation 17:12-14

Explanation: Wars have plagued every century of human history, but has there ever been conflict as devastating as the First and Second World Wars of the 20th century? Has humanity ever possessed weapons as destructive as those we have today? At no other time in history has mankind held the capability to completely destroy civilization as we do now. This overwhelming evidence strongly suggests that what Jesus referred to as “the beginnings of sorrows” may already have taken place. See Matthew 24:8.

Relevance: The 20th century witnessed the most devastating wars in human history, and with the prospect of even greater conflicts looming, it is reasonable to conclude that the time of God’s divine intervention is drawing near. Scripture foretells that in the end times, nations will unite under the influence of a powerful religious authority and stand in opposition to Christ (Revelation 17:12-14). This prophetic vision of a union between church and state at the close of history is echoed in several passages throughout the Bible. In light of these warnings, we must make the ultimate decision to stand firmly on the side of Christ, regardless of the turmoil or conflict that arises between nations.

II. DO SOCIAL CONDITIONS REVEAL THE NEARNESS OF JESUS’ COMING?

Throughout the Christian era, every century has faced its share of social challenges. Yet, we must ask: Have the problems of society ever been as severe and widespread as those we are witnessing in our time? The growing intensity and magnitude of these issues compel us to reflect on the trajectory of our world. How much further can society decline before reaching the tipping point of serious collapse?

The Word:

4. What social problems towards the end of the world did the Apostle Paul vividly portray?

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 2 Timothy 3:1-5

5. How did Peter depict the attitudes of people in the last days?

knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 2 Peter 3:3-7

6. How did Jesus describe the moral state of society immediately before His advent?

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Matthew 24:37-39

Explanation: The striking relevance of these Bible passages to modern society cannot be overlooked. The challenges they describe are vividly reflected in the issues covered daily by the news media. While every era has faced societal problems, none have matched the scale of the current wave of crime, drug abuse, immorality, and moral decline that permeates the world today. Jesus Himself foretold the breakdown of the family, the cornerstone of society, as a sign of troubling times.

In light of this relevance, Jesus, Paul, and Peter collectively urge believers to turn away from all forms of wickedness. Now is the moment to seek the Lord wholeheartedly and allow His transforming power to guide our lives.

III. WHAT WILL ECONOMIC CONDITIONS BE LIKE JUST BEFORE JESUS COMES?

The Bible foretells a time of economic upheaval and rampant selfishness in the last days. It describes a world marked by extreme disparity, where the divide between wealth and poverty grows increasingly pronounced. These conditions will escalate until the Lord ultimately intervenes.

The Word:

7. What economic conditions did James foresee at the end of time?

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned; you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. James 5:1-8

8. What counsel does James give to those whose primary aim in life is money making?

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. James 4:13-17; compare 1 Timothy 6:7-9, 17-18; 2 Corinthians 8:9

9. What guidance does John provide for last-day Christians who struggle with materialism?

So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. Revelation 3:16-18

10. What economic restriction can God's faithful people expect to be imposed upon them before Jesus comes?

He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Revelation 13:16-17

Explanation: This study does not aim to identify the “beast.” However, the Bible foretells a time when followers of Jesus who remain steadfast in their faith will face significant trials, including being denied the ability to buy and sell. Sanctions will be imposed, and economic boycotts will be employed as tools to enforce religious decrees that contradict the Word of God. During this period of persecution, faithful believers will witness the fulfillment of promises such as Isaiah 41:10: *Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.*

Relevance: Do you value your relationship with Jesus above all material possessions in your life?

V. DOES GOD WARN US OF THE END THROUGH EVENTS IN NATURE?

Natural phenomena have occurred throughout every era of history, yet it is the remarkable increase in the frequency and intensity of such events that points to the fulfillment of Bible prophecy..

The Word:

11. What three kinds of natural occurrence did Jesus fore-tell would take place just before the end?

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. Matthew 24:7

12. What natural events in history serve as foreshadowing or examples of the kinds of events expected to occur just prior to the second advent?

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Matthew 24:29; See also Revelation 6:12-13

Explanation: The earthquake, the dark day and the falling stars occurred after the great period of tribulation in which for centuries a church-state union brought turmoil to Bible believing Christians (CE 538-1798). Mark says: *“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken”* Mark 13:24-25.

The Lisbon earthquake of November 1, 1755, also known as the Great Lisbon Earthquake, is considered one of the most devastating earthquakes in recorded history. It had an estimated magnitude of 7.7 to 9.0 and caused widespread destruction in Lisbon, Portugal, and surrounding areas. The earthquake was followed by a massive tsunami and fires that ravaged the city, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of people. This great earthquake, occurring at the beginning of modern history, can be recognized as a sign of the coming end of the world. It was a type or example of the greater earthquake that will immediately precede the coming of Jesus. See Revelation 16:17-20; Isaiah 29:5-8; Haggai 2:6; Jeremiah 4:23-28.

The "Dark Day" of May 19, 1780, was a mysterious and extraordinary event that occurred in New England and parts of eastern Canada. On that day, the sky darkened so significantly during daylight hours that candles were needed to see, even at noon. The darkness persisted until the middle of the following night. The darkness was so intense that animals behaved as if it were nighttime—chickens returned to their roosts, and frogs and night birds became active. The event caused widespread fear and speculation. Many people believed it was a sign of divine judgment or the end of the world. This phenomenal dark day was a harbinger of the world's end and a type of the end-time dark day, immediately before Jesus comes (See Isaiah 13:9-11; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:1-11, 30-32).

The Great Meteoric Shower of November 13, 1833, also known as the Leonid Meteor Storm, was one of the most spectacular astronomical events in recorded history. On that night, thousands of meteors lit up the sky, creating a breathtaking display that was visible across North America and beyond. This great meteoric shower was a partial fulfillment of Jesus' forecast: *“...and the stars shall fall from heaven”* Matthew 24:29. This phenomenon, like the

previous two, partly fulfilled Jesus' prediction (Matthew 24:29). It was a type, or an example of the end-time occurrence associated with the second coming of Jesus. See Isaiah 34:1-4.

Relevance: Some natural events have already occurred, pointing mankind to the nearness of Jesus' coming. The frequency with which we hear of "famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in different places" is a constant reminder that it is not God's intention to delay the end much longer.

V. WHAT WILL BE THE RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF OUR WORLD JUST BEFORE CHRIST'S SECOND ADVENT?

Many of the Bible's prophecies about religious conditions in the last days have already been fulfilled, while others await their fulfillment. All the evidence points to the imminent realization of the events foretold by Jesus and the apostles..

The Word:

13. What claims will many religious leaders make for themselves towards the end?

For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. Matthew 24:5, See also verses 11, 24

14. What did Jesus say would happen to the spiritual life of many people just before the end?

And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. Matthew 24:12

15. What did Jesus foretell about the persecution that His faithful followers will face leading up to His second coming?

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Matthew 24:9-10; compare Matthew 10:16-22

16. What kind of religious deception and intolerance will be manifested before Jesus comes?

And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. Revelation 13:12-15

Explanation: Not since the days of Jesus has there been such profound religious confusion and widespread infidelity. The foundational teachings of orthodox Christianity are increasingly rejected or altered to the point of being unrecognizable. Many are turning to non-Christian Eastern religions, drawn by their captivating philosophies. Meanwhile, fringe groups that label themselves as Christian are promoting unbiblical doctrines and making extravagant claims about their leaders. Adding to the chaos, some religious leaders declare themselves to be 'Christ' or 'Messiah,' while others assume the authority to dictate matters of doctrine and lifestyle.

The teachings of Jesus and the visions of John the Revelator suggest the formation of a church-state union just before the end of the world. For believers to be brought before courts, imprisoned, or even put to death for their faith, the state must collaborate with false religious leaders to enforce laws that contradict Scripture. Is there evidence today of growing cooperation between church and state? History consistently shows that whenever church and state unite, the result has been religious oppression.

Relevance: Our only safety from error and deception is to stay close to the Lord and base all our beliefs on His Word. "To the law and to the testimony! *If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* Isaiah 8:20.

VI. HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR JESUS' COMING?

The Bible offers abundant insight on the victory over sin that God promises to His faithful followers. Scripture teaches that before Jesus returns, He will conclude His mediatorial ministry of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary. At that time, only those who, through His power, are living in victory over sin will be safeguarded from Satan's deceptions and upheld in righteousness.

17. John the Revelator provides insight into the conclusion of Christ's intercessory ministry.

In Revelation 15:5-8 John describes the opening of the heavenly temple and the seven angels being given the seven last plagues. Notably, verse 8 states: *"The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."* This imagery suggests that Christ's ministry of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary has come to an end, as access to the temple is no longer possible. This marks the transition to the final outpouring of God's judgments on the earth, leading up to the second coming of Christ.

Revelation 8:3-5 depicts a moment of profound symbolic and prophetic significance during the opening of the seventh seal. In Revelation 8:3, John describes an angel, representing Christ in His mediatorial role, standing at the altar with a golden censer, offering incense with the prayers of the saints before God. This symbolizes Christ's intercessory work, presenting the prayers of His people to the Father. In Revelation 8:5, the angel fills the censer with fire from the altar and throws it to the earth. This act represents the close of Christ's intercessory ministry and the beginning of divine judgments upon the earth. The accompanying events—thunder, lightning, and an earthquake—signal God's active intervention in human history.

This passage connects Christ's dual role as intercessor and judge, emphasizing both His mercy and justice.

18. When Jesus ceases His intercessory ministry in heaven, what proclamation goes forth?

He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. Revelation 22:11

19. What should our spiritual experience be when the final proclamation is made, and the probationary period granted by God comes to an end?

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. Revelation 3:5, See also Revelation 19:7-8

Explanation: The offering of incense by Jesus, our heavenly High Priest, symbolizes His ministry of intercession and forgiveness (Revelation 8:2-4; compare Hebrews 8:1-2). When He casts the censer to the earth, it signifies the conclusion of His mediatorial work. From that moment forward, sins will no longer be forgiven. Those believers who daily renew their born-again experience are empowered by His grace to live faithfully for God and to overcome sin. It is these faithful ones whom Jesus declares righteous for eternity at the close of probation (Revelation 22:11).

Relevance: Are you actively preparing for the imminent return of Jesus by daily renewing your relationship with Him? Are you relying on His grace to overcome sin, so that when probation closes, you may stand justified in Christ and be declared righteous for eternity?

Review Questions:

1. True or False:

- a. International events point to the nearness of Jesus' coming.

- b. Never have social conditions been as serious as they are today.
- c. False religion will not play a part in end-time events.
- d. Everyone will ultimately receive eternal life.

2. Discuss: If Jesus determines who will be saved before His second advent, what does this reveal about the urgency of our spiritual preparation? The Lord does not bring unrighteous individuals into heaven. Therefore, by His grace, when are we called to live as righteous people? The answer is clear: the time to embrace His righteousness and prepare for eternity is now.