

What Next?

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, after telling His disciples of the future destruction of the temple, they came to Him with the request: “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3). In the verses of our text in Matthew, Jesus outlined the signs and conditions that would precede His coming back to earth. In this lesson, we will study these and other signs that will prevail in the world prior to Jesus’ Second Coming.

1 • In answering His disciples, Jesus warned them to take heed so they would not be deceived by the many who would come and claim to be Christ. During the years after Jesus ascended into Heaven, this declaration has been and continues to be fulfilled. People proclaiming themselves as Christ have come and gone through the years. How should the news of such fulfillment of prophecy affect us today?

2. Jesus said, “Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: . . . For nation shall rise against nation” (Matthew 24:6,7). Certainly this has been fulfilled. The past century has seen two world wars and numerous other conflicts in all parts of the world. At least three major conflicts have been fought by the soldiers of Israel since they became a nation in 1948. The United States has had soldiers fighting in Korea, in Vietnam, and in Kuwait. The United Nations has been busy trying to control the conflicts that are constantly breaking out in all parts of the world. There has been hardly a moment during this time that someone, somewhere, was not fighting a war. What did Jesus say to His disciples regarding these? (See Matthew 24:6.) How can this admonition be accomplished?

3. Jesus foretold that famines would be prevalent in the world in the last days. How true those words are! Africa has been hit especially hard by famine in the last few years. In August of 1994, a massive relief effort was launched in Rwanda. It rivaled the scope of efforts made in the late 1980s in Ethiopia. An advertisement in *U.S. News and World Report* said, “There’s no 911 in Rwanda. But there is an emergency. People are dying, and they need your help. Please give what you can” (September 26, 1994, Page 64). In Somalia, tens of thousands have died. In Zimbabwe, “the Red Cross said it saw thousands of people in terrible shape, in March 1992” (*The Oregonian*, October 20, 1992, Page A3). In Sudan, a Pulitzer Prize winning photo was taken of a Sudanese child, collapsed from starvation. With the billion or more to feed in China, many die of starvation every year. War is tearing up Sarajevo, and the food supply is insufficient. Many people in the United States also go to bed hungry every night.

Summing up the immensity of this situation is a quote from *U.S. News and World Report*, "Famine is a worldwide problem" (*U.S. News and World Report*, October 25, 1994, Page 22). In Amos 8:11, we read of another type of famine which will be a further indication of the last days. What is that famine, and how should we individually prepare ourselves for it?

4. Among other things that Jesus said would come about in the last days, is *pestilence*. This condition naturally follows wars and famines, but it can appear without those. The question seems no longer to be, "When will infectious diseases be wiped out?" but, "Where will the next deadly plague appear?" Faced with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and an ever-increasing number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, the medical profession has had to marshal its forces again and again in the battle against germs and viruses. For all the vaunted power of modern medicine, deadly infections are an ever-growing threat.

Scientists are watching the lethal viruses particularly in Africa and in South America. Germs once confined to certain areas may now hitchhike to all parts of the world. Name some conditions and diseases that could be considered pestilences in today's world.

5. The frequency and magnitude of earthquakes in recent years is another indication of the fact that what Jesus said is true. On Tuesday, January 17, 1995, Kobe, Japan was shattered by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake. The list of reported casualties includes: 5,068 dead, 60 missing, 26,508 injured, and 307,000 homeless (*The Oregonian*, Wednesday, January 25, 1995).

In the United States, in October 1992, a major quake struck the San Francisco Bay area during a World Series baseball game. The shaking stopped just in time to spare Candlestick Park, and the thousands of fans in the stands, from a horrible catastrophe.

Los Angeles and southern California were rocked, in January of 1994, by a 6.7 earthquake that left the people with untold damage and a nightmare of destruction to face and repair.

Such earthquakes are happening frequently around the world, and scientists are predicting more quakes in many different places in the near future. What are some references the Bible gives concerning earthquakes during the Tribulation? See Zechariah 14:3-5; Revelation 6:12-16.

6. When writing to the Christians in Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul said they were well aware of the times and the seasons. In spite of this, he admonished them, "Let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Although they might call themselves Christians, the careless and indifferent are in grave danger of being left behind when the Trumpet of God sounds. Individuals need not remain in ignorance as to the events that

are taking place around us. The “signs of the times” are written in God’s Word so that men and women will prepare themselves for the day Jesus raptures His Church. Based on the 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 text, write at least five admonitions that will help a person prepare for the end times.

7 • In the 2 Timothy 3:1-5 portion of our text, we study a further description of conditions prevalent in the last days. Look the world over today, and you will find a fulfillment of these words of Scripture. The age in which we live is a boastful age. Men are boasting of their scientific discovery and development, boasting of their theories and of the preparations they are making for space travel and investigation of planets in the faraway heavens. Few things seem denied to the wisdom of man today, but with one stroke God can reduce man’s wisdom to confusion, as He did to the builders of the Tower of Babel. The social fabric in these days is breaking down in a marked way. Moral standards are being compromised to the point of almost nonexistence. The Apostle Paul declares that, in the last days, “perilous times” shall come. The last days are here! What are we to do about it?

Key Texts

Amos 8:11; Zechariah 14:3-5; Matthew 24:3-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Revelation 6:12-16

Other Scriptures Used in This Study

Psalm 119:11; Matthew 4:42,44; Luke 21:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17; Revelation 3:15,16

Suggested Verse for Memorization

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

— 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17