

## **Study Topic: Are We Living in the "Time of the End"?**

***What is meant by the biblical "time of the end"? How should we plan and prepare? What kind of hope is God offering us?***

Some people are saying:

"Tell me something, please. With all that's going on in this world, do you feel it's more satanic in nature? People just don't care about other humans any more and are doing so many outrageous things to the common people."

"People losing their homes, jobs and Wall Street gives themselves bonuses? How cruel. People becoming ill with syndrome X and doctors can't explain it. Our foods are not nutritious any more."

"Volcanoes are erupting all over the world. Our Messiah told us about these things, and it's coming to pass."

### **What Does the Bible Mean by the "Time of the End"?**

During the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, He promised that He would come again—the next time to establish His Kingdom on earth. But He also warned that before His return, mankind's evils and suffering would dramatically increase, ending in "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21).

Two seemingly opposite trends were to occur in the end time. On the one hand, interest in some kind of apocalypse would skyrocket. (Actually, "apocalypse" comes from a Greek word meaning revelation or unveiling, but it has come to have a popular meaning of end-time cataclysm.) On the other hand, Peter said "scoffers will come in the last days"—people who don't believe or respect the Bible (2 Peter 3:2-4).

The period leading up to and during the final tribulation is addressed many times in the Bible. It is referred to as *the time of the end, the end time, the end of the age, the latter days, the last days, the day of*

*the Lord* and similar phrases. The Bible gives us a great deal of information about the end time, especially in the book of Revelation and the other prophetic books.

The phrase *end of the world* appears in several places in the King James Version of the Bible. However, modern versions correctly translate those phrases as the "end of the age" (as in Matthew 24:3).

Our merciful Creator loves all people, and that's why He mercifully gives us advance notice of what to expect. Let's now get an overview of His warnings about the end time.

### **First of all, just what is *this age*?**

Galatians 1:3-4

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...

In the New Testament, "this age" refers to the era of man's rule from the creation of Adam and Eve to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Paul called it "this present evil age." That's because Satan is "the god of this age" and "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19). The age "which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21) begins with Christ's return to resurrect the dead and to establish His Kingdom on earth (1 Corinthians 15:21-26).

What did the disciples ask Jesus, and what was His answer?

Matthew 24:3

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Many people don't realize that Jesus was also a prophet—in fact, history's greatest Prophet, foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18! When asked about the signs of His "coming, and of the end of the age," He answered with a lengthy prophecy of the shocking end-time trends, such as wars and unusual natural disasters (recorded in

Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). We will look at details of this prophecy in future lessons.

## **What present world condition proves we are in the end time?**

Matthew 24:21-22

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

The New English Bible helps clarify verse 22: "If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive..." Until the 1940s, there was no possible way, humanly speaking, for all human life to be annihilated. That became possible with the invention and proliferation of nuclear weapons. The development of modern chemical and biological weapons have added to the ways all human life can be destroyed. So it's greatly comforting to know that Christ promised to intervene to prevent worldwide destruction! (In future lessons, we'll learn additional evidence that we are in the end time.)

What will be the great climax of the end-time suffering?

Matthew 24:29

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.

Joel 2:31

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.

The time of "great tribulation" is followed by the "day of the Lord."

Jesus' warning and Old Testament prophecies (Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1; Jeremiah 30:7) tell us that it will be the *worst* period of disasters and suffering the world has *ever* experienced.

Bible prophecies tell us that the period leading up to the Great

Tribulation will be a time of increasing religious deception, religious

persecution, demonic miracles, extreme natural disasters like storms and earthquakes, economic distress, famines, disease epidemics, violence of all kinds, intense conflicts in the Middle East, localized wars plus great regional wars, and other terrifying events and threats. These events will be further explained in future lessons. But there is real hope beyond all of this. Prophecy is gloom and doom for those who won't submit to God. But temporary fear is a healthy thing when it motivates us to put our faith in God! Keep reading, and you will learn lots of good news—the good news about how God wants to guide, protect and bless you and give you eternal life if you respond to Him.

### **Why will God allow humanity to bring all that suffering on itself?**

Hebrews 12:5-11

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Humanity has chosen to reject God's way and to follow the way of get—the way that leads to suffering and death. Mankind is set on the way

of self-destruction, and God will intervene, first to chasten, then to save humanity from itself.

When God "chastens" (punishes) mankind, He does it *out of love* to teach us humans to repent of our sins and to turn to Him willingly. God wants His children to be those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

## **Can we have God's blessings and protection during the end time?**

Luke 21:36

Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

2 Peter 2:9

...then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment...

The Bible gives us many examples of God miraculously protecting His people or providing a way of "escape" during times of danger. We can expect to see many such miracles in the future! At other times, some of God's people have died as martyrs because of their beliefs.

Keep these two comforting scriptures in mind:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

"In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 56:11).

God's people don't need to be fearful of the conditions in the world, for God is our protector and Great Shepherd! Even the thought of death need not terrify us because we know we will be resurrected to eternal life!

For more about being "counted worthy to escape all these things," see the "Apply Now" section below.

## **Is there any hope for our loved ones who have not had any interest in the Bible?**

### **1 Timothy 2:3-4**

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

### **2 Peter 3:9**

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

*Yes, there is!* God "desires *all* men to be saved" and is "not willing that any should perish but that *all* should come to repentance" (emphasis added). Be assured that every person who has ever lived will eventually have his or her opportunity to learn and live by God's truth. God's great plan of salvation will be accomplished through the resurrections, and this will all be explained in future lessons.

## **Apply Now**

Please read and ponder Luke's account of Jesus' Olivet Prophecy in Luke 21, and then focus on how Jesus concluded in verse 36. "Watch" means to be spiritually on the alert. Watch (pay close attention to) world events in light of the Bible's teaching, and watch your own attitudes and actions to make sure you stay on the right path. Start by picking one prophesied world event and one personal weakness to watch and pray about today.