

Part 7 – Eschatology

Section 2: Preparing for the End Times

When will Christ come again?

What is the most important preparation we can do?

When will Christ come again?

While there are several things that are predicted to happen before Jesus returns, he constantly tells us to be prepared for it to happen at any moment.

~~UNPREPARED~~



Being prepared for His second coming is a vital theme and Jesus dedicates a considerable amount of teaching to it. Matthew chapter 24 contains much of this:

“Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples

came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

- This was Herod’s temple, which was utterly destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Apparently not a stone was left upon another, Just as Jesus prophesied. The symbolism of this is that the Church is now the temple of God and there is therefore no need for a building; this prophecy is already fulfilled.

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

- the many happenings here imply that it would be a long period of time before the Lord returned. However Jesus teaches us to always be on the alert, and today there are many clear indications that it will be soon.

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of

most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

- There is a link here between persecution and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. Those who “hate the light” (Jn 3:20) don’t want to hear the truth and are therefore against those who preach it. If we keep a low profile and don’t share God’s word with those around us, we may evade some persecution. But Jesus said in Matthew 5: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” The prophets were persecuted because they spoke out the truth which was often very bleak. We are encouraged by scripture to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), and there is a special blessing attached to persecution.

“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—
- It’s generally thought that this refers to a time when sacrifices will be made in the temple to other gods. According to the apocryphal book of Maccabees this also happened when in 167BC the Greeks set up an altar to Zeus over the altar of burnt offerings in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. They also sacrificed a pig on the altar. This event is known as the “abomination of desolation”. But Jesus is referring to a future event, perhaps of similar nature, that will take place before He comes again.

..then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again. “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

- This passage is difficult to pin down in terms of timing. It implies that there will be a siege of Jerusalem, some commentators saying that it was partially fulfilled when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70AD. But this does not explain the expression “*For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again.*” Nor does it explain the verses that follow. There are many prophecies like this for which we will have to wait until near the end to understand them.

At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

- This is a vital prophecy as it means we can simply reject the many false Christs or religions that have come since Jesus' ascension. Revelation 1:7 says: *"'Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him"; and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him." So shall it be! Amen."* (see also Daniel 7:13,14)

"Immediately after the distress of those days " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

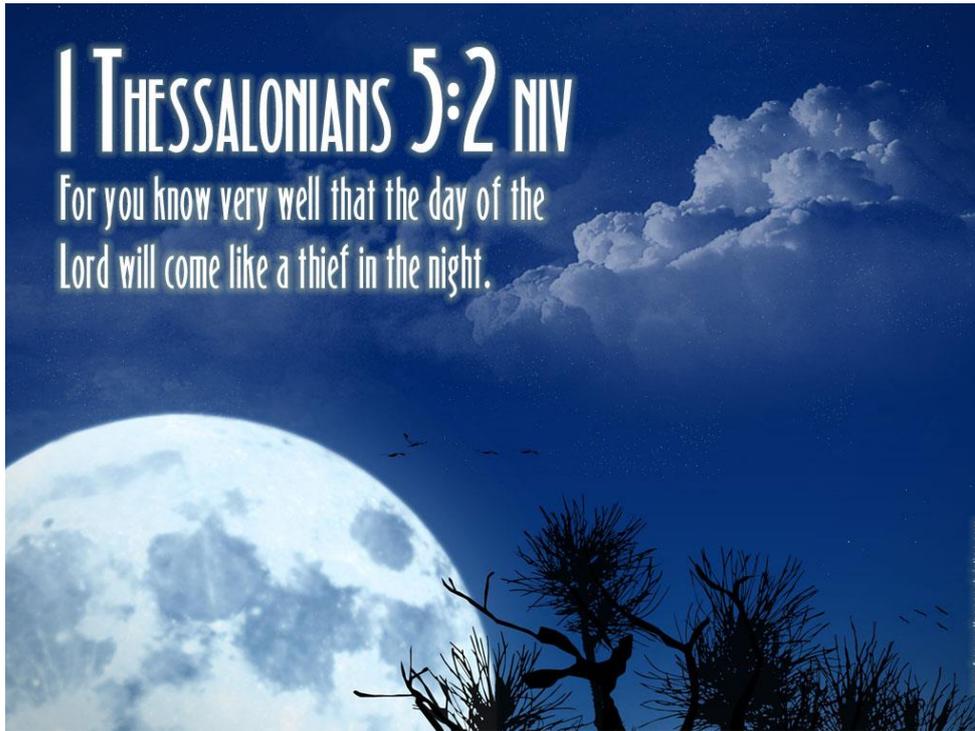
These global events will be seen by all mankind simultaneously. In our time we have growing globalisation with a growing sense that mankind is coming together as one, as in the days of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11). Unity without Christ produces pride and hedonism, or the pursuit of happiness without God, which puts self on the throne.

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The Day and Hour Unknown

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. "Therefore keep

watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.



- the above passages speak for themselves and need no added comment, though there have been a surprising number of attempts to name the date.

Conclusion:

There is much more teaching on the End Times to be found in the scriptures, particularly in Revelation and Daniel. In this short leaflet we have

selected from Jesus' own teaching as His emphasis is on how we should prepare ourselves. In Matthew chapter 25 he also clearly explains who will enter into heaven when He comes: it will be those who have kept themselves full of the Holy Spirit and who spend their time in blessing the family of God, especially helping those in need.

The unity of the church is His priority and it's crucial that the study of the End Times leads towards unity. Only by an honest searching of the scriptures will this happen. There have been many who twist them, as Peter warned does happen (2 Pe. 3:16). They do this to get followers. While it's crucial that we study the End Times, we must beware of churches that give this theme more importance than the Bible does. It's possible for churches to build walls around themselves to keep people in under the pretence that their doctrine is the correct one. But doctrine can only be correct if it centralises the need to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Our neighbour is the one next to us: who we live with, work with, meet in the congregation or who lives nearby. May praise, worship and love be our daily habit as we "eagerly await" His coming! Amen. (Phil 3:20)

Songs: Man of Sorrows (Hallelujah, what a Saviour) (Source 350); When the roll is called up yonder (Source 1617)