

WORLD PEACE COMING IN OUR TIME!

LESSON 2

Scoffers in the Last Days

Ours is an age of agnosticism and atheism. The vast majority are skeptical of the existence of a higher power. Even many professing Christians scoff at the idea of the prophesied intervention of Jesus Christ.

Christ is no longer expected to come back, says John Robinson, Bishop Of Woolwich, England, in his book *The New Reformation?* "I believe," writes Bishop Robinson, "that we must designate ours post-Christian era, in the sense that a Christ is no longer expected. The present generation is unable to recognize Jesus as the Christ. They ask "why should we see in this historical character the focus of all our hopes or the answer to all our problems?" (pages 35-36).

Notice that your Bible foretold this time of scoffers and skepticism.

1. What did the Apostle Peter say would signal the "last days"? 2 Pet. 3:3-4.

COMMENT: "Scoffers" is rendered "mockers" in the Moffatt translation.

2. Does God address rebuke, against such skepticism, especially to Israel? Ezek. 12:21-23.

COMMENT: Surprising as it may seem, this prophecy and the entire book of Ezekiel were written primarily for Our day! When this book was written, the house of Israel (not to be confused with the modern state of Israel) had already fallen and been taken into captivity (from which it never returned) a full 120 years earlier.

History reveals that the ten-tribed house of Israel (the northern kingdom) was taken captive by the Assyrians in 721-718 B.C. However, by the time God spoke this prophecy to Ezekiel (about 600 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was attacking the house of Judah (the southern kingdom) Ezekiel was already in a Babylonian slave camp (Ezek. 1:1), far from where the ten tribes of Israel had been carried by Assyria so long before. He was even further from where some of the Israelites had subsequently migrated.

God gave Ezekiel a message to be delivered to Israel—a message about a future captivity. Yet Israel had already gone into its first captivity long years before! Ezekiel's captors would not allow him to go to Israel to deliver that message.

God knew he would not be able to go before He gave, him prophecy. So, plainly, God did not expect the message to be delivered then and there.

But Ezekiel wrote the message so it would be preserved. And today that message is in the hands of the people to whom it was sent. It is also being proclaimed via radio, television, print and even by how we live our lives as examples, at precisely the time when God intended that they receive it!

3. Does God say that the doubters' proverb would prove worthless, and that the time would come when every vision be fulfilled? Ezek. 12:23, 25. What is the prophecy the modern-day descendants of Israel don't want to believe? Verse 20.

COMMENT: The people say the elapsed time has already been so long that it is obvious the vision will never come to pass. God's answer is that everything will occur as prophesied!

4. Even if people admit the fact that this calamity will come to pass, how do they try to rationalize it away? Verse 27. Does God make it clear that there will be no reprieve from this sentence? Verse 28.

5. Before God sends major punishment upon a nation, does He always first reveal it to His servants? Amos 3:6-7.

COMMENT: Throughout the Bible we find that God has always given people ample opportunity to repent—to quit sinning—before sending punishment for breaking His Law, which defines a way of life, that, leads to peace, happiness and abundant well-being. Time after time God sent His prophets to warn the nations of impending punishments for their disobedience. Yet, in nearly every case, the warnings fell on deaf ears!

6. Hosea calls the end time the "day of rebuke." Do verses 8 and 9 indicate an end-time warning ministry to the nations of Israel? Compare these verses with Hosea 7:12.

7. For what age was Isaiah's prophecy primarily put in writing? Isa. 30:8. (The better rendering of "time to come" is "the latter day," as given in the margin of many translations.) What does God say the character of people in "the latter day" will be like? Verses 9-11. Will their punishment come suddenly, though obvious signs had previously been visible? Verse 19.

8. Is one of the signs of the imminence of dire calamity the world's tendency to ignore and deny the peril? I Thess. 5:3.

9. What message does Isaiah give the mockers and skeptics? Isa. 28:22. Does God warn them of great destruction upon the whole earth? Same verse. Is it linked with the time of God's intervention in world affairs? Verse 21.

COMMENT. Newsweek magazine once spoke of a growing modern phenomenon. It asserted: The U.S. public is the most communication-glutted group of people in world history. Daily bombarded by 'facts' which conflict daily told opposite versions of the same incidents, hopelessly incapable in this complicated world of sorting out the truth, a great many Americans have undoubtedly built a hard shell of skepticism around themselves." The same certainly could be said about most of the developed world today.

Feeling incapable of determining the truth in what they read, see and hear, most people have developed a skeptical, cynical attitude toward taking any warning seriously—even from God Himself. This attitude is one of the curses of our modern age.

God's warnings for end-time age have been recorded in the Bible. But because God seems so unreal to most people, they simply assume the prophecies of the Bible are irrelevant and of no consequence to them whatsoever.

Thus millions today plod on like ignorant sheep—heedless, careless, calloused and skeptical.

They are asleep at the switch—unaware of the grave peril ahead. They are like passengers on a train thundering down the tracks, completely unaware that bridge is out just ahead.

What about you—your household? Are you cynical? Skeptical? Unbelieving?

The world does not have long to wait before astounding, earth-shaking events will begin to shake people out of complacency. It won't be long before the hard shells of skepticism are smashed and shattered!

Prophecy Has NOT Failed!

Let's understand once and for all that prophecy has not failed. We need to realize that every prophecy has a definite time setting, a time usually not in the prophet's own day. One full third of the Bible is prophecy—and about 90% of that prophecy still pertains to this prophesied "end time!"

With this in mind, let's notice certain KEY prophecies.

1. Was Joel's prophecy for his own day, or for the distant future? Joel 1:2-3, 15. What is the "day of the Lord!" Is it the time when God directly intervenes in world affairs? Joel 3:1-2, 11-14. When will this period of time occur—after great signs in the heavens? Verses 15-16. Is this referring to the time when Christ will return? Matt. 24:29-31.

COMMENT: The "day of the Lord" is mentioned in many prophecies of the Bible, it always refers to the time when God will intervene in world affairs, culminating in the return of Jesus Christ to this earth.

2. Did the prophet Isaiah also prophesy of this time? Isa. 24:17-21. What else will happen "in that day?" Isa. 2:11-12.

3. Will all of the prophecies regarding the day of the Lord be fulfilled? Rev. 10:5-7.

4. Will any of the God-given prophecies FAIL to occur? Isa. 55:11. Will the warning message given to the people by God's servants be fulfilled? Ezek. 33:30-33. Is it a pleasant message? Verses 25-29.

COMMENT: Most people today are tired of hearing "bad news." Nevertheless. God's prophecies include BAD NEWS for all those who rebel against Him and trample on His laws! But these prophecies also include much Good NEWS on beyond the prophesied time of world trouble and chaos (Isa. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-4) I Many of the prophecies foretell a time of peace, of happiness. of restoration, of joy, of great prosperity and physical wealth for those who serve and OBEY God. We'll learn more about this GOOD NEWS in a soon-coming lesson.

The World Would Be Deceived

1. While sitting on the Mount of Olives. Christ's disciples questioned Him about His second coming (Matt. 24:3). Did Jesus foretell that MANY deceivers would arise to

deceive MANY people before His return? Verses 5, 11, 24. Are they the ministers of the archdeceiver himself? 11 Cor. 11:13-15. Is the whole world deceived as a result of their activities? Rev. 12:9.

2. But would the TRUTH God also be proclaimed with power around the world before the second coming of Christ? Matt. 24:14. Would this clearly signal the fact that the end of this age is indeed very near? Same verse, last part.

COMMENT: God will not leave the world without a warning witness. Today, His servants are powerfully proclaiming His truth worldwide via the media of radio, television, printing press and by their personal examples. You are studying His message right now as you study your Bible with this Bible Study Course.

3. In the meantime, would the deceivers become extremely active? 2 Tim 3:13. Would men have only an outward show—of godliness? Verse 5. Wasn't Paul clearly speaking of the end time—our perilous age? Verse 1.

4. Did Jesus prophesy that some of the false teachers would even claim He has already returned? Matt. 24:23-26.

COMMENT: As We'll see in the next lesson, there will not be the slightest doubt that Christ has returned when His second coming really does occur!

When Will Christ Return?

Perhaps you have heard preachers declare: "The Lord may come tonight." Is it true the second coming of Jesus Christ could occur at any minute? What did He say about it?

Jesus warned: "Take heed that ye be not deceived!"

1. What is one of the deceits the false ministers would preach? Luke 21:8. Notice the words "the time draweth near."

COMMENT. According to the original Greek in which the New Testament was written, the false message of those claiming to be the ministers of Christ is: "The time HAS COME near," or "The time is at hand" (RSV). In other words, "The Lord may come tonight."

What about it, then? Could Christ return at any moment?

Your Bible teaches that there is a definite sequence of events which must occur first! Study carefully ALL of Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. These chapters clearly reveal that specific events must occur before Christ returns!

2. Did Christ explain clearly that certain events would have to take place before the "end?" Luke 21:9-11.

COMMENT: Notice that the King James English of 1611 is not at all clear in verse 9. Instead Of "by and by," the original Greek phrase is better translated "immediately." Parallel accounts in Matthew 24:6 and Mark 13:7 correctly read "the end is not yet."

3. But once the terrible events Jesus enumerated in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 begin to accelerate, will they all be completed in the lifetime of one generation? Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32.

The "Signs of the Times"

There is a parallel to the widespread lack of understanding of prophetic events culminating in the return of Jesus Christ. The Jews at the time of His first coming also lacked understanding and therefore did not fully recognize or accept Christ as the prophesied Messiah.

Jesus told the religious leaders of His day that the "signs" accompanying His ministry should have been proof enough that He was the prophesied Christ. The Old Testament prophecies, with which they were thoroughly familiar, had foretold the exact time and manner of His appearance on earth!

Yet they refused to believe Him!

1. What did these scoffing Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus to show them? Matt. 16:1. How did He answer them? Verses 2-3.

COMMENT: The religious leaders of Christ's day didn't understand the "signs of the times." Yet they had been taught the Messiah was to come, for that very message was repeated in nearly every book of the Old Testament. In verse 3, Jesus showed them they could understand—if they really wanted to!

2. What additional sign—besides the plain Old Testament prophecies they already knew—did Jesus give? Matt. 16:4. What was the "sign of the prophet Jonas?" Matt. 12:39-40.

COMMENT. Atheists and agnostics scoff at the Biblical record of "Jonah and the whale." Nevertheless, Jesus told the Pharisees that He would be in His grave for the same length time Jonah was in the great fish. This was to be the special "sign" to His generation that He really was the prophesied Christ!

3. Did that sign come to pass? Read Matthew 27:57-66 and 28:1-6. Notice especially verse 6.

COMMENT: Two women came to see the tomb where Christ had been laid. When they arrived, they found it empty. They were told that Christ had risen "as he said" after three days and three nights.

The sign had come to pass!

Jesus proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that He was the prophesied Messiah and Savior of mankind!

"Signs" of OUR Times

1. As Jesus explained to His disciples the events that would precede His intervention (Matt. 24:3-41), what else did He say would occur in the end time besides the coming of many false prophets? Matt. 24:6-7.

COMMENT: World War I commenced in 1914. Nation has continued rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. Just since World War II alone, there have been over 150 armed conflicts around the world! We are now fast approaching the third and final world war!

2. Is famine one of the major signs indicating that Christ's intervention in world affairs is near? Matt. 24:7.

COMMENT. The first decade or so after World War II, food production kept up with population in the underdeveloped countries. But the tables turned in 1958, a crucial year. From that time until now, the birthrate outraced and passed the plow. More and more had less and less to eat.

Since 1958 the crisis has generally grown worse. The first shocking blow came in 1965-1966 with severe drought and threatening famine in India.

Disaster was barely staved off in what will happen the next year the world faces drought and famine? Remember: every year world population grows another 70 million. Every three years the equivalent of another United States is added to the world's population! Many areas of the world face a severe crisis as population passes food production.

In Central and South America, some of the most miserable and depressing poverty can be seen. Yet, in several of these nations the population is expected to double within 25 years. This was once thought to be impossible.

The facts of lagging world food production, combined with the reality of the population explosion, add up to one thing: a crisis of awesome proportions is exploding on the world's doorstep! The several million dying each year now from starvation could soon be multiplied a hundred times.

Hundreds of millions human beings now drawing breath could perish in world-girdling famines! It is not at all a pleasant thought to contemplate.

As C.P. Snow put it "We shall see them doing so on our television sets." Even the affluent nations of the world are not immune to this dire threat!

Killer Disease—Global Pandemics

1. What else was prophesied to occur? Matt. 24:7.

COMMENT: Pestilence is partly the natural result of food shortages and consequent malnutrition, which breaks down the body's natural defenses. In addition, huge concentrations of population are ready-made tinder boxes of potential disease epidemics. More and more crowding means more waste and refuse, more garbage, more pollution of the water, air and land. And more disease! Under crowded conditions, an epidemic can spread from person to person like wildfire. All the great pestilences of the past were just such contagious diseases.

It is not inconceivable that a flu epidemic similar to the one in 1918 could strike. Despite medical science, disease germs, bacteria and viruses have built up an amazing resistance to the "wonder drugs" or a few years ago. Through mutation and adaptation, their resistance to modern drugs and vaccines is becoming even greater. It is very possible that a superflu or other deadly pestilence could sweep the world, killing millions!

Remember also that modern man already lives in an environment of poisons. He inhales dangerously polluted air, drinks contaminated water, and eats pesticide-laden foods. The inevitable result is that the heart, lungs and the entire body in general are weakened, thus lowering resistance to disease, which nearly always strikes the weakest first!

Jesus Christ told the truth bluntly, plainly, without equivocation. He said the world would experience vast disease epidemics in the end time!

Medical experts are growing increasingly alarmed when they study the world situation. They see growing signs of such epidemics. Plagues of cholera and even bubonic plague—the "black death" of the Middle Ages—could make a terrifying comeback in the near future!

Dr. Paul Ehrlich, studying the population explosion in the world today, drew a picture of what could very easily occur in the future. In one of his seemingly prophetic scenarios, he warned of the dire possibility of a vast disease pandemic taking multiple millions of lives as a new, drug-resistant strain of some major disease broke out and quickly spread around the world!

Such a possibility frightens medical authorities because it is NOT mere "science fiction." With the advent of huge jetliners and the tremendous intercontinental air and ship traffic of our age, such diseases could be spread around the world very quickly, just as we have seen with the Covid-19 virus!

Jesus' words, spoken over 1,900 years ago, were certainly prophetic. The next few years will reveal precisely how much so!

Earthquakes!

1. What else will happen with increasing severity? Matt. 24:7. When earthquake activity reaches a peak, will men at last begin to recognize that GOD is intervening? Isa. 2:19-21.

2. Are the signs Jesus foretold only the beginning of sorrows? Matt. 24:8. If this prophesied time of world trouble were allowed to continue, would there be anyone left alive? Verses 21-22.

COMMENT: Famine, disease, pestilence, earthquakes and other disruptions of nature are taking an increasing toll of human life today. And as we have seen, world leaders everywhere are afraid that man's destructive capability will annihilate all life on earth!

The "Four Horsemen"

1. Is the four-part "beginning of sorrows" of Matthew 24 also pictured by the first four "seals" of Revelation 6:1-8?

COMMENT: These four horses and horsemen represent the four major world conditions Jesus said would exist at the end of this age—all increasing in severity and overlapping in their effects on the entire world!

The, white, horse represents the increasing number of false ministers preaching a false Christ and ways to "salvation." The red horse pictures the increasing tempo of the ravages of wars. The black horse—increasing famine. And the pale horse—rampaging diseases.

2. What tremendous toll of life will be taken by these "four horsemen of the Apocalypse"? Rev. 6:8.

COMMENT: Just imagine, if you can, ONE-FOURTH of mankind dying during a period described as only the BEGINNING of sorrows!

But let's not forget, man is bringing this horrible suffering and death upon himself! Jesus knew that man, left to his own devices, would so afflict himself and would ultimately destroy all life—unless something totally unforeseen occurred to stop it. That is why He has promised to intervene in world affairs. Jesus Christ is coming soon to rescue the world from itself because man has just about reached the end of his rope!

The "Abomination of Desolation"

1. What was another sign Jesus gave to indicate when "the end" was near? Matt. 24:14-16.

2. Did Jesus identify the "abomination of desolation" as that one which was spoken of by the prophet Daniel? Verse 15.

3. What was Daniel told about a desolating abomination? Dan. 12:11. Would it exist in the end time? Verses 4, 9.

COMMENT: Notice that this abomination is something which occurs in the vicinity where sacrifices are being made.

4. Where else does Daniel mention an "abomination of desolation"? Dan. 11:31.

COMMENT: Verse 31 was once fulfilled in ancient history. Most Bible scholars concede that most of the eleventh chapter of Daniel was fulfilled in history by the struggles of the Seleucidae of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt—called the kings of the north and the south by Daniel.

Verse 31 was once fulfilled when Jerusalem was conquered and the Temple of God was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, in 168 B.C. (See *Rawlinson's A Manual of Ancient History*.)

5. But Jesus said the "abomination of desolation" was still future, didn't He? Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20-24, especially verse 20.

COMMENT: Then at least a part of Daniel 11 must dual! And no wonder, for we find the chapter concludes with the "time of the end" (verse 40) leading up to the resurrection of the saints (chapter 12:2). (In the original text, there is no chapter break between Daniel 11 and 12).

But what is the "abomination of desolation" prophesied for the "time of the end?"

Putting Bible prophecy and historical fulfillment together, we can get an idea of what this abomination of desolation will be. Historically, the, abomination of desolation occurred when Antiochus Epiphanes moved against Jerusalem with his armies. The latter-day fulfillment will occur when invading armies are again set up against Jerusalem (Luke 21:20). These armed forces will then crush and spoil the city (Verse 24), stopping whatever daily sacrifice may be instituted by then. These actions by the brutal occupying armies will be great abomination for the entire city and cause the desolation thereof.

The modern "abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15), or "that maketh desolate" (Dan. 12:11), therefore will be vicious and catastrophic troubles caused by invading armies in Jerusalem.

Sudden Destruction!

1. Will there be warfare at, the same time in the Middle East? Luke 21:23-24. Will the city of Jerusalem be captured? Verse 24; Zech. 14:1-2. By whom? Same verses.

COMMENT: Some have wondered if Jerusalem's destruction by the Gentile Roman armies in A.D. 70 was the fulfillment of this prophecy.

A.D. 70 was not "the END!" The presence of Roman armies in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was only a type of what is to occur in the near future. The Roman legions which conquered Jerusalem then only a type of MODERN legions which will soon again surge through the Middle East.

2. Will half of Jerusalem's population eventually be carried away and the whole city looted? Zech. 14:2. Will this time be especially hard on women? Same verse.

COMMENT: This is why Jesus warned "WOE" to pregnant, and nursing women (Matt. 24:16-19). It will be very difficult for them to escape at this time!

3. Will this future military action in the Middle East threaten to engulf the whole world? Matt. 24:21-22. Will this time of "great tribulation" that ensues—this time of unequalled strife and bloodshed involving weapons of modern warfare— threaten to utterly extinguish all life on earth? Verse 22.

COMMENT: This is the very time Jesus Christ must intervene. Never before in human history has man been able to destroy all life on this planet. These prophecies can only refer to this latter day and the immediate future!

World's Population Decimated

1. Does the Bible prophesy a great future war? Rev. 9:14-18. How many will die in this terrible conflict? Verses 15, 18.

COMMENT: Horrible as it sounds, the millions who died in World War II will be as nothing compared to the enormous decimation of human life just ahead! Roughly one-third of the human race will die in this war. And remember, this death toll is in addition to the millions of others who will die of famine and disease!

2. In summary, what does Isaiah prophesy concerning the earth's population when Christ returns? Isa. 24:1, 3. Why? Verses 5-6. What is the number of the "few" people still alive compared to? Verse 13; Isa. 17:4-6.

COMMENT: In spite of the tremendous carnage that will take place before Christ returns, there still will be millions of earth's inhabitants left alive. With these as His subjects. Christ will begin His rule on earth.

"Watch You Therefore..."

1. Will Christ's coming catch most people unawares—their minds completely occupied with their own problems, hopes, fears and pleasures even in the midst of the most terrible times the world ever known? Matt. 24:37-39.

2. What, therefore, is Christ's warning to us? Luke 21:34-35. What, specifically, are to do and why? Verse 36

COMMENT: Jesus plainly shows us that we must watch world events and pray in order to ESCAPE the trouble mankind is bringing upon itself—lest we be snared by it and therefore unprepared for His coming.

3. Will the events—the "signs"—preceding Christ's intervention be difficult to discern? Or will they be as obvious (to those who are watching) as the changing of the seasons? Compare Luke 21:29-31 With Matthew 24:32-33.

COMMENT: Are you watching carefully the step-by-step fulfillment of Biblical prophecies on the world scene? Are you taking diligent heed Jesus' words of warning and praying so you may escape?

May God help you to do so!

God MUST Intervene!

When we take a hard, cold, realistic look at present world conditions and trends, they DO point to a fast-approaching world crisis of war, starvation, uncontrollable disease epidemics, and the extinction of human life on this planet!

Man simply has no solutions to these terrifying problems! The further he goes, the more destructive become his efforts. His technology has gotten out of hand—beyond his capacity to control wisely.

World leaders, statesmen, and scientists look at this terrifying world picture and admit they are frightened! They warn us man's only hope lies in the formation of a SUPER WORLD GOVERNMENT wielding all authority and power over the nations.

But the nations, hostile against one another, could never form such a government—at least not willingly.

Let's face it! Either there does exist a living GOD of supreme mind and total POWER who very soon will step in and intervene in the affairs of this world to SAVE humanity from itself—or else the EXTINCTION of all life will inevitably occur, sooner or later, as man unleashes the awesome forces at his control upon his neighbor!

The next lesson shows exactly how God will intervene in this world's affairs to save mankind alive.