

Matthew 24:1–8, 14

INTRODUCTION—If you knew the hour and day that the world would end— would you tell anyone??

I first began to consider the Christian faith during my senior year of high school, when some friends asked me to read “*The Late, Great Planet Earth*” by Hal Lindsey.

I. THE SIGNS — vv. 1–14

1. Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. What Jesus foresaw was the destruction of the Temple by Roman Legions in A.D. 70.

2. This sounded like “Apocalyptic” forecasting. The disciples, their curiosity piqued, asked Jesus when the “end of the world” will come. So—Jesus spelled out some definite warning signals:

3. First: watch out for false Messiahs!!

v. 5—many will be deceived.

v. 6—wars and rumors of wars—but a way to go to the end.

v. 7—Famines? Earthquakes? Still only minor pointers.

4. Second: watch out for persecutions!!

v. 9—Persecuted and put to death—This has happened at various times and in various places in the history of the Christian church. Thirty years after the Resurrection of Jesus, as the Christian faith spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire, Emperor Nero decided to pick on the new and growing minority in Rome, scape-goating them for all sorts of things wrong in Rome. When the city caught fire, Nero blamed the Christians. Many Christians were caught in Rome, and Nero had dozens of them dipped in wax and burned alive to light his gardens.

Those persecutions ended long ago!! What about persecutions in modern times???

In Communist Russia, where Lenin believed that “religion is the opiate (drug) of the masses,” Christians were often persecuted. There is the story, from a few decades ago, of two Soviet soldiers who broke into an evening church service and told everyone to leave or be shot for their faith. About half of the believers present got up and left. Then, the soldiers locked the doors behind the last to leave, and turned to those who stayed, and said that they—the soldiers—were also Christians, but it wasn’t safe for soldiers in an officially atheistic state to admit to being Christians. They hoped that those willing to die for their faith in Christ would be willing to keep the soldiers’ secret faith to themselves, and pray quietly with those soldiers.

Persecutions—False Prophets—increase of wickedness—just the *beginning* of end things.

5. The “trigger” for the *end*—v. 14

As I read Jesus’ insights here, of all the “signs” from the Book of the Revelation and Daniel and whatever some people point to try to DEFINE the “end of days,” this sentence from the lips of Jesus is the best and clearest indication of when Christ will return. When “*this Gospel . . . will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations. . .*”

Has the Gospel yet been preached in the whole world?

Depends on how you define the “whole world . . .”

On every continent—Christ has been preached.

Greek: *oikoumene* == “inhabited earth”

Missions experts tell us that almost ½ of the population of the earth *still* has never heard a credible explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in their own language.

II. BEWARE — WATCH OUT!!!! vv. 15–29

1. What is the “Abomination that causes Desolation”?

vv. 15. Alexander the Great, you’ll remember, conquered much of western Asia some 330 years before the birth of Jesus. After his death, his General Seleucid controlled western Asia (other generals controlled other areas Alexander had conquered, like Egypt or Persia).

In 168 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes, one of Seleucid’s descendants, conquered Israel and entered the Temple in Jerusalem, entered the Holy of Holies, set up an altar to Zeus, and some say he sacrificed a pig on the altar to Zeus. An *incredible sacrilege and offense* to Jews!!

2. What to do when the end is near?? Run!! vv. 16— 22

Christians actually followed Jesus’ instructions here in A.D. 70, when the Romans were threatening Jerusalem. They ran to the mountains that were the Transjordan mountains, where Pella is located.

3. Again, beware of False Messiahs. vv. 23— 28

v. 27—“*As lightning. . . is visible. . .*” The return of Christ will not be a secret—everyone will see and know.

v. 28—“*. . .the vultures will gather.*” As the gathering of vultures clearly show the location of carrion, the coming of Christ will also be obvious.

III. THE SON of MAN . . . vv. 30–35

1. **He will literally, physically, visibly return in the skies!!!**

2. This is also described in I Thessalonians 4:16 (read)—“*For the Lord Himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*” and in Revelation 19:11 (read)

3. They all testify that Jesus will collect the “elect” of believers and followers.

4. *How have Christians interpreted what Jesus said, over the years??*

Different ways. St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (what is now Tunisia in North Africa) in the late 300's and early 400's, was perhaps the most brilliant Bible scholar and theologian since the apostle Paul—he finally concluded that the return of Christ described here was essentially a personal, spiritual event, not to be taken literally. (One of the few things he wrote that I disagree with.)

5. Many Christians around the world believe that Jesus will return on the “Clouds of Glory” as Jesus and the Apostles promised—it is just that no one is sure of the “when” He will return!!

IV. WHO KNOWS WHEN??? vv. 36–44

1. If the return of Christ is to literally happen, when will it take place??

2. The answer of Jesus: like the old Gospel song, “Nobody KNOWS but Jesus.”

3. A lot of things we might think will point to His coming will not!!

vv. 38—39.

4. It will happen suddenly: vv. 40—41.

5. The important thing: KEEP WATCH!! v. 41.

6. Be Ready—the Son of Man will come: When you do not expect.

7. Word of Advice: Be a Wise and faithful servant. vv. 45—47.

CONCLUSION—Several of my friends made decisions for CHRIST in our junior and senior years of high school. Mike Fey was one.

We played trumpet together in the high school band One summer evening before our senior year started, Mike came by my parent’s house to talk—about the return of Christ. As we sat in the classic 1970 Mustang his parents had

bought for him, in the dark, he told me that even tho' JESUS said 'No one would know the "hour or the day," God had revealed to Mike the month and the YEAR!!'

The month—August!! The year—many years ago

The problem—Christians have tried predicting the return of Christ for centuries. So far, every prediction has proven wrong.

(Like the wrong predictions of the Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.)

— >>THE LESSON: *JUST BE READY!!!*