

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for Feb. 6: Be prepared for the return of Jesus Christ_20705

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Be prepared for the return of Jesus Christ

Luke 21

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Jesus left us hope before he returned to the Father. He has promised he will come again in the future to consummate his salvation plan for all creation.

In the beginning of this chapter, Jesus took the opportunity of a widow's offering in the temple to tell his listeners ahead of time the signs of the end times and his return (vv. 1-6). Jesus prophesied these events not as a threat, but rather to remind them to prepare and to be watchful, especially those waiting for his return.

We should be aware that the hardship of life, wars and sufferings that

precede the end times are not special signs immediately followed by his return. Jesus said instead that these events characterized normal life until the end (v. 9).

People are very curious about their future and destiny. There are many reasons for this curiosity, and one of them is a desire to control the future. People want to know God's plan, but not always because they want to follow it. If they know God's plan, they know how to deal with God and keep their lives under their control.

When people heard of Jesus' prophecy, they asked, "Teacher, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" (v. 7). We still can hear these questions in churches and among Christians. Seminars and books about such topics usually are very attractive to Christians.



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But Jesus did not directly answer their questions. He instead gave them a warning: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them" (vv. 7-8).

Beginning with the 1st century, we have seen many heresies and false religions that claimed to be God himself reincarnated on earth or a savior among the people. There also have been people who have claimed they had the keys to unlock the mysteries of the end times.

The purpose of Jesus telling us about the end times and its signs was not to arouse our curiosity or to unlock the mystery of our future. Jesus wanted us to be prepared for persecution and to be steadfast to our faith (vv. 12-15, 19).

Among the signs, the destiny of Jerusalem and its temple was the landmark in this last part of human history. About 40 years after Jesus' prophecy, the temple was demolished. All the inhabitants of Jerusalem either were killed in war or enslaved in the year 70 A.D. Later, Jerusalem went through a second destruction in 135 A.D. and was rebuilt as a pagan city with a pagan temple on the site where God's temple had been.

Some interpreters of Scripture see the establishment of Israel as a nation in 1948 as a fulfillment of the Bible's prophecy concerning the region. Other prophecies about the region may soon be fulfilled.

They are just like the fig trees and all the trees, "when they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near" (v. 30). As a gardening fan, I don't know exactly when the seed will germinate, but when I see the sprouts on the ground, I am sure spring is here. The most important thing for us is to watch and recognize the signs to know that the kingdom of God is near (v. 31).

We may not know God's timetable, but we are sure of his promise that his "words will never pass away" (v. 33). This is the confidence we need instead of the satisfaction of our curiosity of future events.

Jesus was definitely not a fortune teller, so why did he tell us these future predictions? His purpose was not to arouse our curiosity about the future.

He wanted to alert his disciples and witnesses to live righteous lives and to have the right focus. In the time of trouble, Jesus knows we may be deceived, led astray or persecuted. He wants us to “be always on the watch, and pray that we may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that we may be able to stand before the Son of Man” (v. 36).

Jesus will return, and everyone will be called to stand in front of his judgment. Christians also will be judged by how they live their lives. Jesus will look for his faithful and good servants to reward them. The end of the age is a big trial for all Christians. We have to overcome it by living a Christ-like life in order for us to be able to stand before the Son of Man at his second coming.

Discussion questions

- ◆ What is your attitude toward the biblical prophecies of the end times?
- ◆ Why has Jesus told us about all the future happenings?
- ◆ Are you more curious than obedient?

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