

OUR PRESENT AGE



MARK 13:23

"But take ye heed:
behold, I have foretold you all things."

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When Jesus spoke these words, He had just taught about the events

that would characterize the last days and lead to the age of the Antichrist and His return. This is the same teaching found in Matthew 24 and Luke 21.

Mark 13:23 gives the assurance that we can know where we are in the last days. Jesus' teaching upon the mount of Olives over 2000 years ago did not echo the uncertainty that overshadows the last days in our twenty-first century. He taught so we would not be confused.

There are two cautions in this verse:

1. Take heed
2. I have foretold you all things.

The cautions were given to encourage us to be on our guard, not to be unaware of when these events take place. Jesus gave very specific events to keep us alert and aware. He also warned that we are without excuse for not knowing the times we are living in when he warned, "I have foretold you all things." Jesus told us about the events of the last days before they happened so when they took place we would know why they were happening and where we were on the prophetic timeline.

This Scripture doesn't give us room to *agree to disagree* or to allow for the multitude of contradicting viewpoints about the last days on the basis that *no one knows for certain, not even Jesus*. We are meant to know. Jesus taught so we would know. Not knowing where we are on the last days timeline is without excuse. Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders of His day in Matthew 16:2-3 could just as easily be applied to our generation:

"He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

CERTAINLY, A DILEMMA

Jesus teaches so we will know; but our present age tells us we cannot know because not even Jesus knows. This is perhaps the main reason we give ourselves permission to hold onto many versions of the last days ... but let's take a closer look at Mark 13:32:

"But of that day and that hour knows no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.."

Jesus spoke these words after explaining what events would take place in the last days and the ordering of these events. He gave very specific events to be on the lookout for, even the coming of the Antichrist who appears only during earth's last seven years. When the Antichrist appears, we can begin to count down the years ... 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. We can know when the world has only seven years remaining. We can know when His coming will be within a specific year, and that His coming will be on any day. There is no imminency of His coming at present. Much has to take place before Christ returns.

Jesus did not mean that we would not know where we are on the prophetic timeline, only that we would not know the specific twenty-four hour day or sixty minute hour of His return. Because of His clear teaching, we can, with confidence, say we are in the last of the last days in anticipation of the arrival of the Antichrist to begin earth's final seven years.

With certainty we can know where we are in the last days through the events Jesus gave to us, but we will not know the specific day or hour until that day/hour arrives.

DOES JESUS NOW KNOW WHEN HE WILL RETURN?

In His Mount of Olives teaching on the last days in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, Jesus did not know the day or hour of His return, only His Father knew. It wasn't until later, in the book of Revelation, that Jesus was given more knowledge about His return.

The book of Revelation was not the revelation of the apostle John, but the revelation of Jesus Christ which He shared with John. A revelation is a disclosure of something that was not previously known. This leads us to ask, "What information was Jesus given that He did not previously know?" The subject matter of the revelation gives the answer. The book of Revelation is the expanded, detailed version of Jesus' Mount of Olives teaching.

The new information that Jesus was given was detailed information of what He taught in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. These details would fill in the pieces necessary for knowing when Jesus would return. The vision gives a chronological ordering and timing of earth's last seven years. When we get to the end of the seven years, Jesus is told the events that would lead to the day and hour of His return, the rapture, and the end of the present earth. The revelation filled in the details Jesus didn't have when He was upon the earth. Through the revelation given to Jesus by His Father, Jesus was given the details of His return. (Rev 1:1)

SINCE WE CAN KNOW, WHERE ARE WE ON THE PROPHETIC TIMELINE?

The brief version of where we are on the prophetic timeline is found in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. The longer, detailed version is found in the books of Daniel and Revelation. Together we have the prophetic timeline from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to the return of Christ.

In Matthew 24, Jesus taught His hearers in 28 short verses the events and ordering of the last days. (Mat 24:4-31) If we knew nothing about the prophecies of Daniel and the book of Revelation, we have in Matthew 24 the timeline we need to know where we are on the prophetic timeline. In these 28 verses Jesus organizes His teaching into three categories to respond to the three questions asked by the disciples.

QUESTION 1 *When shall these things be?*

With this first question, Jesus gives an overview of the entire last days. He organizes His answer into three categories of events. In this first question we are given the timeline and ordering of last day events.

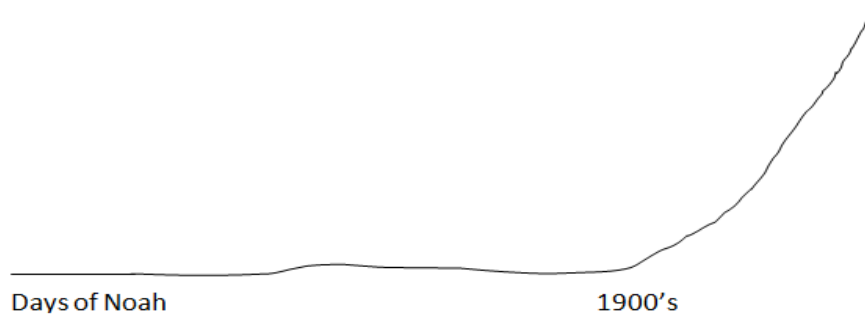
THE FIRST CATEGORY OF EVENTS identifies events that “must first come to pass.” (Mat 24:4-6) These events take place from the time of Jesus until the next set of events called the “beginning of sorrows.” These events are everyday events. They do not tell us the end is coming soon, only that the beginning to the end has started. (Mat 24:6)

The events that have always taken place throughout all generations are:

1. Deception
2. Wars
3. Rumors of wars

No one can deny that these events have always been with us throughout history.

THE SECOND CATEGORY OF EVENTS identifies those events called “the beginning of sorrows.” (Mat 24:8) These events let us know we have entered earth’s last generation. They are called “the beginning of sorrows” because they move us toward the great tribulation. Some of the newer Bible translations call this the “beginning of birth pains.” (Mat 24:7-14) This creates the image of a woman whose pregnancy pain and discomfort increases in intensity and frequency until there is great pain and the child is born. These beginning of sorrows events will also increase in frequency, pain, and multiply in number until the great tribulation is released. This is being fulfilled in our twenty-first century. If we were to chart this increase of events, this spike would look like this:



Nation against nation. (Mat 24:7)

The Greek word for nation is “ethnos” and refers to people groups, ethnic groups, and nations. There will be more nations and more ethnic and people groups fighting each other than at any other time in history. This all has greatly increased in the twentieth century and will continue to increase until the arrival of the Antichrist.

Kingdom against kingdom. (Mat 24:7)

The Greek word for kingdom is “basileía” and refers to a large territory ruled by a king or president. A kingdom is the same as an empire, such as the United States, Great Britain, and Russia, which rule over large portions of land, not always on the same continent. Never in the history of the world have we had empires warring against each other on a global scale, not until WWI. Then we had WWII, and now we have most of the world in conflict with Islam. The beginning of this fulfillment can be dated to 1914, when WWI began.

Famines, diseases, earthquakes. (Mat 24:7)

Today more than 795 million people suffer famine. That is more people than the entire population of the world in 1750. Without question more people are affected by famine than at any other time in history.

Concerning the increase in disease, consider this statistic: Just one in 20 people worldwide (4.3%) had no health problems in 2013, with a third of the world's population (2-3 billion individuals) experiencing more than five ailments, according to a major new analysis from the Global Burden of Disease Study (GBD) 2013, published in *The Lancet*.

Concerning earthquakes, there are almost one million earthquakes that take place every year throughout the world.

Persecution will continue to increase (Mat 24:15-25) until it gets so bad that we will go through many troubles, be killed, hated, and betrayed even by family, parents, children, fellow Christians, and friends. (Lk 21:12-19) Because of persecution, many Christians will be offended, and their love for others will grow cold. (Mat 24:9-14) Today Christians are the most persecuted people throughout the world. This persecution will continue to increase to move us to the great tribulation.

The great tribulation. (Mat 24:15-22)

Global persecution will continue to increase until the Antichrist appears and brings his great tribulation to the entire world. His purpose is to kill every Christian, Jew, and anyone opposed to him. (Mat 24:15-28) This great tribulation will begin after the Antichrist sets himself up in the temple as the “abomination of desolation.”

(Mat 24:15) He will then surround Jerusalem with his military and attempt to completely destroy her. (Lk 21:20)

The tribulation and times of trouble we are presently going through and will go through becomes a witness to our persecutors as they observe our immovableness from Christ in these most difficult of times. (Mk 13:9, 10)

The Gospel will be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; after this, the end will come. (Mat 24:14) God’s mercy will be shown to all people before the great tribulation and earth’s last seven years take place. This mercy is shown with the sharing of the Gospel to all people, giving them the opportunity to prepare for the return of Christ and escape the eternal hell to come. Just as Noah preached for 120 years to give the people time to prepare before the flood came, so must we be about the business of warning others about the judgment to come.

This preaching of the Gospel is up to you and me. The Gospel will not be heard if a person who knows the Gospel does not tell those who don’t. This is the responsibility of everyone who claim the name of Christ.

By calling these events the “beginning” of sorrows, we are shown that they will continue to increase until the pressure caused by these events is so great that we want to shout, “Stop the world! I want to get off!” The “beginning of sorrows” events greatly increased with WWI and continue to increase so that in our twenty-first century the quantity and frequency of these events are everyday occurrences. If you were born in the 1950s or older, you have experienced this increase with your own eyes. If you are younger, a search of the internet will reveal how much these events have increased.

QUESTION 2

What will be the sign of Christ's return?

The Scripture is clear when Jesus will return: He returns immediately after the great tribulation brought by the Antichrist. (Mat 24:29, 30) Before His return, the sun, moon, stars, and all of the heavens will be shaken. It is these events, taking place in the sky, that lets us know Jesus will be here at any moment, literally within a sixty second minute.

When He returns, it is not a happy occasion for the people left on earth who do not belong to Christ. They will mourn because of His coming. (Mat 24:30) For those who belong to Christ, it is a day of great celebration and dancing, because our redemption has come. (Lk 21:28) I encourage you to choose Christ and to look forward to that great celebration with Him and His angels.

QUESTION 3

What will be the sign of the end of the world?

After Jesus returns, He then sends out His angels to gather all God’s people to take them to where He is (Mat 24:31); this is the rapture. It is this rapture of God’s people that lets those left on the earth know that the end of all things will take place within any minute.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Jesus did not go into a long discussion about the events and ordering of last day events. The bottom line to what He taught was that:

1. There are certain events that we are to keep our eyes on.
2. These events will continue to increase throughout history.
3. When we enter the beginning of sorrows and the great tribulation, these events will be so intense and frequent that life will eventually be filled with almost unbearable pressure.
4. After the great tribulation, Jesus returns.
5. After Jesus returns, the rapture takes place.

Here's what Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 looks like in chart form:

Matthew 24

Question 1		Question 2		Question 3
Everyday Events 24:4-6	Beginning of Sorrows 24:7-14	Great Tribulation 24:15-28	Christ Returns 24:29, 30	Rapture 24:31
Deception	Nation against nation	Abomination of desolation in temple	Sun, moon, stars doesn't shine, all of heaven shaken	Jesus sends angels to gather up His people
Wars	Kingdom against kingdom	Jerusalem surrounded by armies	Jesus returns in clouds	We enter eternity
Rumors of wars	Famines	The great tribulation		
	Diseases			
	Earthquakes			
	Persecution			

Moving through the last days is nothing more than the increase in frequency, intensity, and quantity of the events taught by Jesus. They will become so intense that they become the "great tribulation" and "perilous times" spoken of by Jesus and the Apostle Paul. These times will be so difficult that if Jesus did not bring an end to these days, even the strongest of Christians will feel great pressure to depart their faith. (Mat 24:22)

According to our chart, we are currently living at the end of the beginning of sorrows. The next event to take place is the arrival of the Antichrist, his seven year treaty with Israel, and the great tribulation.

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