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BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW 5

5

The Second Coming of Christ

ASSIGNMENTS

- **TRUTH** – encourage your JG to read the supplemental reading material, *The Tribulation*, found online.
- **EQUIPPING** – This week your JG should have memorized the 12 Minor Prophets. You should ask one of two people in your group to recite the whole Old Testament, or recite the whole New Testament again. Some in your JG may be ready to recite all 66 books of the Bible now. By now, you should have everyone in your group scheduled to recite them during future meetings.
- **MISSION** – This week your JG should have read the second *Life Issues* booklet. They should read both the introductory section, “Do Non-Christians Really Deserve Eternal Punishment?” and answer the questions in the margins of the chapters from the Gospel of John.
- **MISSION** – Listen to audio message *Life Issues Booklet 2 Explanation*.

EXERCISES

- Review the memory verse of the week and talk about how it relates to the **TRUTH** section.
- Review the Pentateuch, Historical books, Poetic books, Major and Minor Prophets of the Old Testament.
- Include time for one or two JG members to recite all 66 books of the Bible.

DISCUSSIONS

- **TRUTH** – You can discuss any of the **IN BIBLE** questions you would like to address. Here are some tips that may help:
 - **MATTHEW 13:24-30** – The Parable of the Weeds has allegorical elements, that is, the elements of the parable have real-life counterparts. The “wheat” represents the people of the Kingdom. The “weeds” represent those who are not part of the Kingdom. The “barn” is God’s Kingdom, and the “harvest” is the judgment that will occur at the end of the age. Jesus’ main point about the Kingdom is that God’s people and the people of this world will co-exist for a long time, not being separated until the judgment and reward at the end of the age.

- **MATTHEW 24** – This chapter is very difficult to understand, so the questions are designed to lead people to a conclusion as well as help them discover truth for themselves. The questions the disciples asked shows that they did not truly understand what they were asking. To them, the destruction of the Temple, the sign of His coming (to conquer and reign as opposed to wandering the countryside) and the close of the age were all the same event. We have the benefit of history and can see that that this was not the case. History has shown that the destruction of the Temple is really a separate question from that of Jesus' reign and the end of the age. The main difficulty in interpreting this chapter is discerning which part of the question Jesus is answering, so it's important to look for contextual clues.

It is also helpful to know how the Bible looks at time in general. We tend to think of the Bible as dividing time into the New Testament and Old Testament eras. Actually, the outlook throughout the Bible is that time is divided into *the Present Age* (marked by suffering, yet not without hope of deliverance), and *the Age to Come* (marked by the deliverance of God's people from every enemy, physical and spiritual). From the perspective of the New Testament, the Age to Come was inaugurated in the life and ministry of Jesus, but would not be consummated until His return in the glorious power of His Kingdom. Keep this in mind as you help your JG struggle through Matthew 24.

- **VERSES 4-8** – Jesus' introductory response is to comfort the disciples. He does not want them to be deceived or alarmed by the wars, famines, earthquakes and other troubles in the world. These should be expected, like the first signs of a woman's labor pains, and are *not* signs of the end of the age.
- **VERSES 9-14** – These verses describe in more detail what the time of "birth pains" will be like. The word used to describe this time is "tribulation," meaning trouble, or difficulty. There will be hatred, betrayal, deception and apostasy. But at the same time, the gospel will be preached to the ends of the earth. This shows that Jesus is describing the Church age from the time that others will come in His name falsely (verse 5), to when the gospel will have penetrated every nation on earth (verse 14). The church age will be a time of success and growth for the Church but also a time of tremendous opposition. Then the end of the age will come. Verses 4-14 then, are addressing the second part of the disciples' question.
- **VERSES 15-28** – The severe trial and suffering described as "great tribulation" in verse 21 is associated with events that are local to Judea. This, and the fact that Jesus speaks of the desolation of Jerusalem (all Jews thought of Jerusalem and specifically the Temple as "the holy place"), indicates that this great tribulation would be caused by a war that would take place *only* in Judea. Jesus is now answering the first part of the disciples' question. There is no indication of when this war would be or how long it would last, but the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70 seems to fulfill

the details of the prophecy. History reveals that the Jews did, in fact, flee to mountain strongholds during this time, and there was a high expectation of a Messianic rescue though none came.

- **VERSES 29-31** – It’s difficult to know what Jesus means by “immediately after the tribulation of those days...”, though He is probably referring to the time that will follow the tribulation/ Church age, not the “great tribulation” of 1st century Judea. The signs of Jesus’ coming are cosmic in nature (verses 29-30), indicating that they are greater and more awesome than any earthly calamity that we can imagine. These cosmic disturbances would lead one to think of the end of the present age. At that time the Son of Man will return in the clouds (a reference to Daniel 7:13) announced by a trumpet call. The people of earth will mourn (indicating they know their doom is near), while the people of God will be gathered from around the world and raised to greet Him in the air. There are unmistakable similarities between this passage and Matthew 13, as well as the passages you studied last week on glorification and the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4), and the depiction of the Judgment in Revelation 11. These similarities are described in the unit material. The similarities are a strong indication that all of these things – the resurrection, glorification, and gathering of the saints, the judgment of unbelievers and the consummation of Christ’s Kingdom – will occur at the Second Coming of Christ.
- **VERSES 32-35** – The “he” in verse 33 is the Son of Man, Jesus. “This generation” in verse 34 refers to the generation that is alive at the time of the cosmic signs referred to in verse 29-30. The Second Coming will occur during this generation’s lifetime.
- **VERSES 36-41** – Jesus is still dealing with the second part of the disciples’ question. He affirms that no one knows the day of His return, thus it will come unexpectedly on the world, just as the flood came unexpectedly in Noah’s day. Those who are “taken” are not believers who are raptured out of the world before a seven-year tribulation. They are the unbelievers who are swept away in judgment just as they were in the days of Noah.
- **VERSES 36-51** – The moral of the story, so to speak, is “always be faithful.” The discussion will probably gravitate toward details of interpretation, books about prophecy or current events in the Middle East. But you should make sure the conversation loops back to Jesus’ exhortation about faithful service to the Kingdom during the present age of tribulation.
- **JOHN 16:33** – Believers can expect trouble in this present age of tribulation. But we are not left without hope. Jesus is our victorious King, so we can be at peace knowing He will return for us.

- **TRUTH** – Here are the main points about the Second Coming that you'll want to make clear:
 - The Second Coming of Christ will bring about the end of the present age. When He returns it will be to reign as King, reward and glorify His people, and judge His enemies.
 - There will be no seven-year period of worldwide tribulation. Tribulation is actually a characteristic of the Church age that will end when Christ returns.
 - The Second Coming will not be a two-stage event. The Rapture will not be a separate, secret return of Christ that precedes the Second Coming by seven years. It is part of the Second Coming and will be immediately followed by Jesus' descent to earth to establish His Kingdom.
 - The prophetic glimpses we have of the future are intended to encourage us to live faithfully in devoted service to the Kingdom of God.

- **EQUIPPING** – Some in your JG may have believed the common Dispensationalist teaching on the Rapture and Tribulation all their lives. If so, these teachings have probably had an impact on their spiritual growth. For some people, this impact is decidedly negative, so that any discussion of the end times leaves them feeling insecure and anxious about Christ's return. If someone in your JG struggles with this, remind them of what they've learned about God's grace: God did it all so that they could get it all.

When Jesus spoke about the need for faithfulness He wasn't implying that people had to earn their qualifications for His Kingdom when He returns. Such a performance motivation would only generate anxiety or self-righteousness, while killing true biblical assurance. Grace motivated faithfulness looks hopefully to His return, knowing that He has qualified you for His Kingdom. A lack of hopeful longing for Jesus' return (as demonstrated by a lack of faithfulness to His Word) is a strong indication that one doesn't belong to the Kingdom.

- **ACCOUNTABILITY** – Allow time for smaller groups of two or three to ask accountability questions and pray for one another.
- **MISSION** – Continue the discussion of helping people investigate Christianity using the *Life Issues* booklets as a tool for making the gospel known. Discuss the question, "Do Non-Christians Really Deserve Eternal Punishment?" from the second *Life Issues* booklet.