

# What on Earth is Going On?

## Session 4 - The Coming of the Messiah

*Warm-up question: How do you picture the Church in the Last days? The scriptures tell us that as the days get darker, the glory of the Lord will appear upon the saints. What do you think this looks like?*

We begin this study in the book of Luke, chapter 21, where Luke records for us Jesus' Olivet Discourse. This talk which Jesus delivers on the Mount of Olives is also found in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. Matthew mentions that this talk takes place on the Mount of Olives (verse 3), as they look westwards and below them to the Temple Mount. The view is spectacular from this vantage point as it is only a few hundred yards. It was here Jesus talked to the disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of His coming at the end of the age, as they looked out over the city. In his gospel, Luke goes into greater detail and records Jesus' words about the fig tree. This is where we will start:

<sup>25</sup> "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in **anguish and perplexity** at the roaring and tossing of the sea. <sup>26</sup> **Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.** <sup>27</sup> **At that time** they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> When **these things** begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." <sup>29</sup> He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. <sup>31</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> "I tell you the truth, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all **these things** have happened. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. <sup>34</sup> **"Be careful,** or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and **the anxieties of life,** and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For **it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.** <sup>36</sup> **Be always on the watch,** and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:25-36).

In order to understand the verses in this passage concerning the Parable of the Fig Tree (verses 29-38), it will be helpful to have some context for what Jesus has been saying in the last few verses before the Parable and the instructive verses that follow. Verses 25 to 28 have given us a dark picture of the days just before the Return of Christ. There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars, and on the earth whole nations will be in anguish and perplexity, with problems and situations that leave the human race with no way out. The leaders of the nations will be perplexed (Verse 25), a state of confusion and uncertainty as to what to do, the situation being so dire. Whatever is happening on earth will cause men to "faint from terror" (Verse 26). The Greek word *Apopsychō* is translated using the English word faint, which means:

"to depart life. To expire, die, breathe out one's life; to faint, swoon, and pass out. This could refer to the heart losing courage and dying to fear (Luke 21:26), or it could mean a literal fainting in the face of awesome and terrible events. The scriptures describe a time so devastating that people will be overwhelmed with terror and acutely distressed by the dreadful spectacles around them. They will suffer emotional and psychological devastation in anticipation of what is coming upon the earth because they are unprepared to face the coming of God." <sup>1</sup>

*What does the phrase, "when these things begin to take place" mean in verse 28?*

I believe the Lord Jesus is talking about the various signs that will precede His coming, those that are mentioned in verses 8-11, symbolized by the seals of the book of Revelation which we studied in session 3. We are not to be focused and concerned with what is happening on earth, but we are to lift up our heads, which is a picture of getting our eyes off of what is happening on earth and looking up to heaven praying for our Savior to come and set things in order, receiving us to Himself.

<sup>1</sup> Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Lexical Aids, Page 1952.

As we have read from Revelation and Matthew's and Mark's gospels, now it is confirmed also by Luke. The Lord Jesus comes for His people after the cosmic signs in the sun, moon and stars. The heavenly bodies themselves will be *shaken* (Verse 26). The Greek word that is translated *shaken* is *saleuō*, it means to "waver, agitate, rock, topple and to shake".<sup>2</sup> When a man looks to the heavens from earth it will look as if the planetary systems themselves will be shaking, and stars falling from the sky. It seems that the earth's axis will be damaged and the earth will be tilting and moving on its axis. Isaiah the prophet says the same thing: <sup>19</sup> The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. <sup>20</sup> The earth **reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind** (Isaiah 24:19-20). No wonder that people will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the earth (Verse 26). When the world is at its darkest hour, the Lord Jesus will come. <sup>27</sup> **At that time** they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Verse 27).

It is in the context of the things that are happening on earth that we will now look at verses 29-36. I am examining the interpretation of the Parable of the Fig Tree as it relates to the timing of the end of the age. As we know, we cannot determine the exact time of Christ's return. Even Jesus, while He walked in human form on earth was dependant on the Father for knowledge (John 8:38) and was not able to determine when this time would be;

<sup>32</sup> "No one knows about that **day or hour**, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come (Mark 13:32-33).

Notice that in the above verse, it is *the day or the hour* that we are not to be concerned about. When we studied Paul's letters to the church at Thessalonica we are clearly told that those who are living their lives with a heavenly perspective should know the seasons and be aware of the things happening on the earth that point to the soon coming of our Lord. So *although we cannot set dates, we should be aware of the signs of the times*.

The Parable of the Fig Tree is an encouragement for us to watch the signs of the times. Let's examine more carefully what Jesus is saying in this passage.

<sup>2</sup> E-sword.com on the word that is translated "shaken"

The following are the two most popular interpretations of the Fig Tree parable.

The first concerns the nation of Israel. In this interpretation, the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. There is not much scriptural evidence to support this theory. I have found only one verse concerning fig trees that are used to describe the nation of Israel:

<sup>10</sup> "When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree (Hosea 9:10).

For those that adhere to this interpretation, they believe that the nation of Israel being established in 1948 and growing in territory through five successive wars (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982), are like the leaves being sprouted before summer, the summer symbolizing the time of the Second Coming of Christ. In that view, the Israeli need for defensive borders because of the many enemies around her, have led her to secure the Golan Heights from Syria in the North East of the country, the West Bank of the Jordan, Southern Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Desert from Egypt. In the present state of affairs (December 17, 2007), much of this territory has been given back. If this interpretation is correct, why then did Jesus mention the phrase: "and all the trees?" (Verse 29).

The second interpretation, which is the one I personally believe, is that just as new leaves and new growth on a deciduous tree is a sign that spring is here and summer is close at hand, in the same way when you see the signs of the times taking place (Verses 8-11, and 25-26), you will know that the coming of Christ is soon to take place. This is verified by Jesus using the phrase "*these things*" twice in verses 28 and 32. I believe this parable to be an encouragement to His people that are enduring through some of the difficult times that are mentioned. We'll know when we see these things happening that the kingdom of God, the full manifestation of the righteous rule and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ over the earth, will soon be complete and evil will be judged.

*Do you believe that we are living in the season when we will see these things come to pass? What events have you witnessed in the news that could be described as signs of the "leaves sprouting?"*

*Verse 32 is a difficult verse to unpack. How do we interpret what the words "this generation" means?*

<sup>32</sup> "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. (Mark 13:32).

Some say that the words *this generation* means the Jewish nation, that Jesus is saying that even though Israel will go through difficult times as a people group, they will survive and not "pass away." Others say that those who were listening to His words as He was sitting there on the Mount of Olives would not pass away until He came again. However, history shows us that could not be true. Although it seems clear that the early disciples were anticipating seeing the Lord's return in their lifetime, I can't go along with the theory that this is what Jesus was referring to. Another interpretation is that a generation is a period of time lasting forty years. This does have some credibility in that we know that the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years and Moses, who wrote the book of Numbers, called them a generation:

<sup>13</sup> The LORD's anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the desert **forty years**, until the whole **generation** of those who had done evil in his sight was gone (Numbers 32:13).

Some say that the generation that sees the recapture of the city of Jerusalem (which happened in 1967) will also see the coming of Christ (see previous study, verses 12-28). Those that hold to that view see a forty year period that began with the end of the times of the Gentiles:

<sup>24</sup> "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

Of course, the question then is at what point does the forty years start, if it is forty years that is meant? Those that think along those lines see the year 2007 as being a crucial prophetic year (forty years being a generation from the recapture of Jerusalem from the Gentiles in 1967). I would remind us though, that the Temple Mount is not in Israeli hands. The Temple Mount is under Moslem caretakers (Gentiles means non-Jews) with two Islamic mosques on the Temple Esplanade. My view is that Jesus is simply saying that the generation of people who see the signs of the times

will also be the same generation who will see the fulfillment of all these things. He wants us to have eyes that are open to what is going on in the world and as we see the things written about in the scriptures being fulfilled. We are to focus on that which has real value; Christ, and the people He loves.

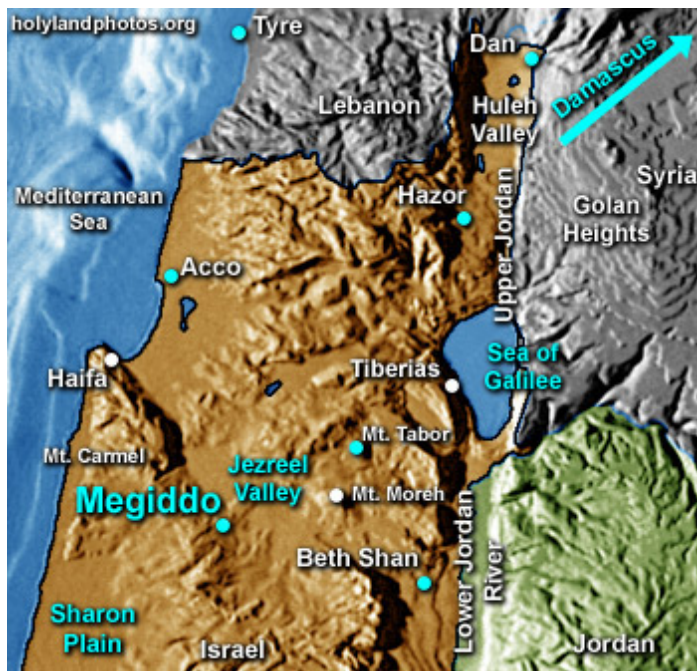
*What is the location on earth that the Messiah returns to?*

If you ask most Christians, they will say without hesitation that it would be Armageddon, but is that correct? I don't read anywhere in the scriptures of Jesus returning to Armageddon. Let's read the Bible's only reference to Armageddon in its context, and explore what it says:

<sup>12</sup> The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. <sup>13</sup> Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. <sup>14</sup> They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, **to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.** <sup>15</sup> "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." <sup>16</sup> **Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.** <sup>17</sup> The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" <sup>18</sup> Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. <sup>19</sup> The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed (Revelation 16:12-19).

The word Armageddon comes from two Hebrew words, "*Har*," which literally means a hill or mountain, with the second word being "*Megiddo*," which is a place name of a strategic hill where the town or city of Megiddo was once located. The antichrist sends forth evil spirits to gather together the nations of the world that they may attack Jerusalem. This gathering is at a strategic place in Israel, to the area around a city that once regulated trade on the International Highway, the main trading route between three continents. Below the hill of Megiddo, and stretching east to Northwest is the very fertile Jezreel valley. The western end of the Jezreel valley ends at Israel's main port of Haifa. The

nations of the East that cross the river Euphrates can easily meet up with other nations disembarking from ships in the port of Haifa. Nations from the North of Israel can come through Lebanon. It would be a perfect gathering place.



But the objective of the nations of the world is not to capture a valley but a city! A city that has been a problem since it's recapture by the Israeli's in 1967. We're talking about Jerusalem. God twice tells us that Jerusalem is His city (Isaiah 45:13; Lamentations 3:51). That is why the city is so strategic, and has also become such a target, as the enemy will always seek to kill and destroy whatever is earmarked by God. Scripture tells us that before the time of the end, Jerusalem will be a big problem:

<sup>2</sup> "I am going to make **Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling**. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> On that day, when **all the nations** of the earth are **gathered** against her, **I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations**. All who try to move it will injure themselves (Zechariah 12:2-3).

There are a number of things in this passage of interest. First we are told that the nations around Israel will be stumped at their inability to sort out the problem of a Jewish state in their midst, and especially as to who owns Jerusalem. Is it a Palestinian city, or Jewish? Should it be an international city? Secondly we are

told that Jerusalem will be a problem not only for the Arabic nations around her but for all nations, it will be, "an immovable rock." The third thing we are told is that all nations will be **gathered** against her. Doesn't it sound like Armageddon is just the gathering place for an attack on Jerusalem itself? It very well could be that the attack is launched on Jerusalem while the bulk of the international armies are still arriving and gathering at Armageddon. If that is so, Jesus will appear over Jerusalem when He comes and possibly later destroy the rest of the armies gathering at Armageddon. The distance between Jerusalem and Megiddo is around 75 miles.

<sup>8</sup> On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. <sup>9</sup> On that day I will set out to destroy **all the nations that attack Jerusalem**. <sup>10</sup> "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. **They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him** as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. <sup>11</sup> On that day the weeping in **Jerusalem** will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. (Zechariah 12:8-11)

Verse 10, in the passage above, speaks of a time when many nations are gathered against Jerusalem to destroy her. It is clear from the text that the Messiah (Christ) Himself shows up and the Jewish people recognize Him as the one that was crucified, the one who was pierced. What is their response? There will be a time of great mourning and repentance. Notice that the time of this attack is just before the Day of the Lord (v.31) according to the prophet Joel:

<sup>30</sup> I will show **wonders in the heavens** and on the earth, blood and fire and **billows of smoke**. <sup>31</sup> The **sun will be turned to darkness** and the moon to blood **before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD**. <sup>32</sup> And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for **on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem** there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls. <sup>1</sup> "**In those days and at that time**, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> **I will gather all nations** and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning **my inheritance, my people Israel**, for they scattered **my people** among

<sup>3</sup> Image obtained from: [http://holylandarchive.com/section\\_images/MegiddoMap0305.jpg](http://holylandarchive.com/section_images/MegiddoMap0305.jpg)

the nations and **divided up my land** (Joel 2:30-3:2).

*What things stand out to you about this passage of scripture?*

- 1) There will be a time of cosmic events.
- 2) These cosmic events are before the Day of the Lord.
- 3) In those days and at that time (Verse 1) all nations will gather against Jerusalem.
- 4) A Deliverer will show up on Mount Zion (a literal mountain in the center of Jerusalem) and many people will turn to Him and be saved.
- 5) This Deliverer will enter into judgment on the nations for the way they have treated His inheritance, the people of Israel, and the way that they have divided up His land (Joel 3:2).

Where is the valley of Jehoshaphat, where the nations will be gathered? Jehoshaphat's enemies were destroyed just to the east of the Mount of Olives, as the mount starts to decline toward the Dead Sea Valley (2 Chronicles 20:15-17). Tradition puts the valley of Jehoshaphat to the west of the Mount of Olives. Whether it is to the east or the west of the Mount of Olives, one thing is certain, the locality is Jerusalem. When Jesus was taken up into heaven and the disciples were watching Him go, two angels appeared and told the disciples:

<sup>11</sup> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven". <sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the **Mount of Olives**, a Sabbath day's walk from the city (Acts 1:11-12).

Where did the ascension of Christ take place? Scripture is clear that it was on the Mount of Olives. We are also told that Jesus would come back in the same way He left. I understand this to mean that it will happen at the same geographical location, the Mount of Olives. The evidence from the New Testament is that Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives, which is where He was last seen when He departed physically and visibly from His disciples. The Lord also said that He would not come until Jerusalem would cry out for Him:

<sup>37</sup> "**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem**, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often **I have longed to gather your children together**, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

<sup>38</sup> Look, your house is left to you desolate. <sup>39</sup> For I tell you, **you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord** (Matthew 23:37-39).

The traditional place of battle between God and His enemies is Armageddon, but the scriptural evidence seems to point to an appearance at Jerusalem first. Let's explore further by looking at what the prophet Zechariah tells us too:

<sup>1</sup> **A day of the LORD** is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. <sup>2</sup> **I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it**; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. <sup>3</sup> **Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle.** <sup>4</sup> **On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem**, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. <sup>5</sup> You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. **Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.** <sup>6</sup> On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. <sup>7</sup> It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light (Zechariah 14:1-7).

Isaiah the prophet says some thing very similar:

<sup>1</sup> Woe to you, **Ariel, Ariel**, (*Ariel is another name for Jerusalem*) the city where David settled! Add year to year and let your cycle of festivals go on. <sup>2</sup> Yet I will besiege Ariel; (*Remember that God is sovereign over the affairs of men and He has allowed this attack on Jerusalem so that the inhabitants will finally call on Him and be saved*) she will mourn and lament, she will be to me like an altar hearth. <sup>3</sup> I will encamp against you all around; I will encircle you with towers and set up my siege works against you. <sup>4</sup> Brought low, you will speak from the ground; your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will come ghostlike from the earth; out of the dust your speech will whisper. <sup>5</sup> But your many enemies will become like fine dust, the ruthless hordes like blown chaff. **Suddenly, in an instant,** <sup>6</sup> **the LORD Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire.** <sup>7</sup> Then the hordes of all the nations that fight against Ariel, that attack her and her fortress and besiege her, will be as it is with a dream, with a vision

in the night-<sup>8</sup> as when a hungry man dreams that he is eating, but he awakens, and his hunger remains; as when a thirsty man dreams that he is drinking, but he awakens faint, with his thirst unquenched. So will it be with the hordes of **all the nations that fight against Mount Zion** (Isaiah 29:1-8, Mount Zion is a part of the city of Jerusalem).

#### Luke 21:34-36 Warnings to Watch.

<sup>34</sup> “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man”.

*How can we prepare ourselves while we are watching and waiting? Also, what warnings do you see in these verses and how can we relate them to our day?*

I really believe that one of the most practical things you can do to prepare yourself is to be in a Small Group. When I came to Christ in 1977, Small groups were an unheard of phenomenon, even though scripture has many references to the need of being in a Small Group. It was only when Paul Yonggi Cho of Seoul, South Korea, who has the biggest church in the world, wrote about Small Groups in his book, *Successful Home Cell Groups* that many pastors began to listen. I believe that Small Groups are so important for the days ahead in that only in a Small Group can you begin to support one another. Whatever dark days are ahead, knowing other believers and being known, might possibly be the difference between life and death. We have read the scriptures that families will betray one another to death (Luke 21:16), but the intimacy of worshipping and growing together with 6-12 others in a group will make all the difference to your spiritual lives. Look at the evidence of China, how the church has grown under persecution, while they have been forced into Small Groups and house fellowships. The growth has been phenomenal with conservative estimates of more than 80 million believers.

Another thing we can do to prepare ourselves and make ourselves ready is to know the word of God, letting it guide our lives, giving us peace to navigate through difficult times. Luke reminds us to be careful

(Verse 34). The King James Version says “take heed to yourselves.” Here we are encouraged to take care of the central core of our lives, our hearts. The dark world we live in has a way of shaping the inner core of our lives away from intimacy with our Lord Jesus. We can be “weighed down with dissipation” (Greek word *Kraipalē*, which means to suffer a headache due to alcoholic drinks, it carries also the meaning of dizziness and staggering). It speaks of one feeling like the only way to cope with life’s pressures is to try and forget our present circumstances and focus on activities that will desensitize us. We also see a reference to drunkenness and the anxieties of life. Notice that anxiety is likened to dissipation and drunkenness.

*Where do you turn when under pressure and anxiety? What type of activities help you cope when you are under stress?*

The spirit of a man or woman can be easily dulled by the anxieties of daily living. There are different ways that people choose to handle pressure. For some, the pressures of living in this dark world will lead them to a greater devotion and dependency on the Lord and on the truth and comfort we find in His word. Others will be like the ostrich that hides its head in the sand, seeking escape. When this world weighs you down, let it be something that drives you to Christ! Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

The second part of verse 34 has some words of warning concerning the time of watching and waiting Jesus knew His followers would go through. This is similar to the Parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, five missed the call to enter the wedding with the bridegroom. The reason that they missed the call was because they were not ready and waiting! (Matthew 25:12). The passage finishes with the warning to “keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew 25:13).

*What does it mean to watch and wait? What practical things can we do to watch and wait?*

I don’t want you to be an addict to the TV news, but weigh up what you hear in the news magazines, Christian TV and other news outlets with a focus on the Word of God. Meditate on the Word of God daily! We are told in Chapter 21, verse 34, that the day of the

Lord will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth, and that it will close on many unexpectedly like a trap. Many will hear the message of God's love and mercy and will put off the decision to turn to Christ for His forgiveness. The word picture is of a trap being sprung over an animal or a bird that is quite unexpected. Many people do not realize that there is a closing time to this period of God's grace with the door being shut (Luke 13:25). The day of God's grace will close unexpectedly and they will be left outside, having to pay the penalty for their sin themselves. It will be a tragic scene. Matthew's gospel records Jesus as saying something further about this time:

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23).

These will be good people that have attended church and even helped in ministry, but the door will be shut like a trap sprung unexpectedly with the words echoing through the ages, "I never knew you!"

The enemy of our souls wants to lull us into the deception that we can always wait, that time is on our side. He would like us to believe that we will always have tomorrow to make our peace with God, or put things right with our brother, or make necessary changes in our lives that will help us to draw closer to God. Our enemy, the devil, seeks to keep us bound by our senses to the things which are of this world. The truth is, we do not know how long we have. We are not guaranteed any amount of time. The promise of salvation is for today.

<sup>2</sup> For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Those of us who have accepted and acted on God's free offer of salvation should be always on watch (Verse 36). The Greek verb *agrupneo*, translated "watch," literally means to keep oneself awake, to be on the alert as to threatening danger, to be on guard. The word picture is of a soldier standing guard to ward

off an attack and to alert the rest of the troops. Those that are awake to the things going on in the world are to awaken their fellow soldiers and those that are, as yet, civilians, to become soldiers of Christ. Our God is not willing that any perish, but that all may come to turn their lives over to Him (2 Peter 3:9). How full of joy we will be when in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51). Paul tells us that the Lord will come down from heaven, with a loud command (how the enemies of our God will tremble)... and we who are still alive will be caught up together with our loved ones who have already gone to heaven. We will meet the Lord and our loved ones, in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Imagine the joy of seeing Christ come and set everything right. The suffering of this world will be gone. God wants each one of us to be able to look forward to this day and welcome His coming. He has paid the price for each one of us to be delivered from judgment through His substitutionary death on the cross.

I do believe that as we get closer we will see more of the gifts of the Spirit in operation as the church becomes more responsive to the Spirit. Many of us are scared about the days ahead, but the Lord longs for us to put our trust in Him. He desires us to cast ourselves on Him and rely on Him in times of adversity. We will see, I believe, a powerful move of the Spirit of God, and that will be why there will be a backlash against the church from the evil one. Let me share with you a story that will illustrate our need to be sensitive to the Spirit of God in the days ahead:

Efim Gerasemovich Klubniken was an unschooled Russian that had moved to a town called Kara Kala, Armenia, in the present day country of Turkey. Efim and his family were Pentecostal Christians. As everybody in Kara Kala knew, when Efim was eleven years old he had heard the Lord calling him to several prayer vigils. One particular prayer vigil lasted for seven days and nights, and during this time he received a vision. I quote from Demos Shakarian's book, *The Happiest People on Earth*:

"This in itself was not extraordinary. Indeed, as Grandfather had been accustomed to grumble, anyone who went that long without eating or sleeping was bound to start seeing things, but what Efim was able to do during those seven days was not so easy to explain. Efim could nei-

ther read nor write. Yet, as he sat in the little stone cottage in Kara Kala, he saw before him a vision of charts and a message in beautiful handwriting. Efim asked for pen and paper. And for seven days, sitting at the rough plank table where the family ate, he laboriously copied down the form and shape of letters and diagrams that passed before his eyes.

When he had finished, the manuscript was taken to people in the village who could read. It turned out that this illiterate child had written out in Russian characters a series of instructions and warnings. At some unspecified time in the future, the boy wrote, every Christian in Kara Kala would be in terrible danger. He foretold a time of unspeakable tragedy for the entire area, when hundreds of thousands of men, women and children would be brutally murdered. The time would come, he warned, when everyone in the region must flee. They must go to a land across the sea. Although he had never seen a geography book, the boy prophet drew a map showing exactly where the fleeing Christians were to go. To the amazement of the adults, the body of water depicted so accurately in the drawing was not the nearby black sea, or the Caspian Sea, or even the further off Mediterranean, but the distant and unimaginable Atlantic Ocean! There was no doubt about it, nor about the identity of the land on the other side: The map plainly indicated the east coast of the United States of America.”

It was at the turn of the century that Efim announced that the time was near of the fulfillment of the words he had written down nearly fifty years before. “We must flee to America; all who remain here will perish.” Efim and his family were among the first to go. As each group of Pentecostals left Armenia, they were jeered by those who were left behind. Skeptical and disbelieving folk—including many Christians—refused to believe that God could issue pinpoint instructions for modern people in a modern age. But the instructions proved correct. In

1914, a period of unimaginable horror arrived for Armenia. With remorseless efficiency, the Turks began the bloody business of driving two thirds of the population, out into the Mesopotamian Desert. Over a million men, women and children died in these death marches, including every inhabitant of Kara Kala. Another half a million were massacred in their villages, in a pogrom that was later to provide Hitler his blueprint for the extermination of the Jews.”<sup>4</sup>

Those that had a sensitive heart to obey the Spirit’s direction and voice were delivered from the time of persecution. I believe it will be the same in the days ahead for the Church. It is time to begin to trust God to a deeper degree so that He can lead us and guide us in the midst of darkness. The end times will usher the Church into greater intimacy with Christ which will push back the darkness that exists around them. Isaiah the prophet wrote of a time that was future to him, a time which I believe is just around the corner still. He talks about darkness, a thick spiritual darkness that will pervade the earth, but in the midst of this terrible darkness will be the light of the Messiah (Christ) shining in His people. He says:

<sup>1</sup> “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. <sup>2</sup> See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you (Isaiah 60:1-2).

Prayer: Father, I thank you for your faithfulness and the strength that you provide. I ask that you teach us to listen and make your word clear to us so that we can walk with you day by day. As we look forward to your coming, we lift up our heads and say together; “Come Lord Jesus!”

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4 Demos Shakarian, *The Happiest People on Earth*, Page 20, Printed by Spire Books.