



## A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE END TIMES

Week 18: Barely Clinging to Hope

August 28, 2022

Instructor: Steve Schmutzer

### I. BACKGROUND:

**A. In our study series: “A Biblical View of the End Times,” we’ve been working our way along a certain path.**

1. In one respect, we are moving from Genesis to Revelation.
2. As much as it makes sense to move from the front of the Bible to the back of the Bible, we’re doing that.
3. In another respect, we are layering events in the pattern the prophetic timeline layers them.
4. For example, there is the Rapture, then the Bema Seat judgment, then rewards, and so on.
5. I am making an effort to present the prophetic timeline in a proper order, and that also means we will jump around in the Scriptures a bit.

**B. That brings us to where you and I find ourselves right now in this present life.**

1. I imagine most of you are here because you are seeking clarity and knowledge about the end times.
2. If you’ve been here for even a few lessons, you already know that Bible prophecy comprises almost 30% of God’s Word.
3. Last I knew, we have about 14 churches represented in this room. This community-based Sunday School is drawing from as far away as Wyoming and southern Loveland.
4. I already know that many of you are distressed that the churches you’ve been part of are not teaching Bible Prophecy, and even if they DO touch on it, they often misrepresent it in some way.
5. A lot of you are running around with one eye on God’s Word and one eye on the news.
6. You see events taking shape that Jesus warned us of, and you know the time is short before He takes true believers out of here.
7. You can feel the tensions of the world situation rising....

**C. As a result, you are doing ALL you can, to learn ALL you are able, during these challenging and difficult times.**

1. I also know that many of you are discouraged, worn out and exhausted.
2. You’re ‘fighting the good fight of the faith’ (*Cf. 1 Timothy 6:12*), but you have some cuts and bruises.
3. You’ve made the right choice to ‘take hold of the eternal life,’ (*Cf. 1 Timothy 6:12*) and you’ve disciplined your views to be focused on the long term instead of the short term, but it feels like your gas tank is down to fumes.

4. You're 'running with endurance the race God has set before you,' (***Cf. Hebrews 12:1***) but you're getting spiritual leg cramps, and are now just barely limping along.
5. You are starting to wonder if you can keep up this 'blessed hope' as you keep looking for 'the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ' (***Cf. Titus 2:13***).
6. Often, in the vulnerable and secret corners of your heart, you wonder if you can continue to hold up under your questions, your confusions, and your unfulfilled expectations.
7. Perhaps you even wonder if you've been misled somehow, or if you have misunderstood something. This gnawing concern saps your strength.

**II. I want to set the stage here. Let's look at a time when things were really rough!**

- A. To start, it was a time when corrupt world powers and a depraved world system had full control and the final say over everything.
  1. If this corrupt power didn't like something that was going on, they could shut it down. Even viciously if they wanted.
  2. There was a price to pay for speaking the truth and for confronting this depraved political system. One could be persecuted, imprisoned, or could even lose their life.
  3. In an effort to preserve their personal security, the people laid low. They just went about their daily routines and tried to avoid any confrontations which might backfire on them.
- B. Also, to make matters worse, it wasn't like the religious system or its leadership were doing anything to confront or expose these problems.
  1. Sadly, many of the religious leaders were actually in cahoots with the political system.
  2. Instead of speaking out against the corruption, these religious leaders often urged conformity to government mandates.
  3. Most of the prominent religious leaders weren't properly leading the common people or teaching them the truth.
  4. Important prophecies from Scripture were overlooked and dismissed. The Scriptures were clear, but very few religious leaders sufficiently cared.
  5. Instead, in the wake of short-sighted and errant ideas, heresies abounded in the religious structure.
  6. The worship system of this time was radically split. Many leaders were very liberal. Just about anything was OK with them.
  7. They wanted to conform, and they felt affirmed when their ideas were accepted by secularism.
  8. On the other side, extreme rituals were elevated over having a right relationship with God. With this second group, it was all about legalism.

9. What was important to them was elevating a system of “do’s and don’ts.” However, they had something in common with the first group: They too were threatened by any Scripture which confronted their choices.
10. As far as the general religious institution was concerned, its primary focus was on money, on visuals, and on preserving a certain culture that made it feel proper and righteous - - even when it was not.
11. Important truth got lost in the middle. It wasn’t getting taught, and very few people had a grasp of what was happening.
12. Monumental events were about to take place, but the religious system was clueless and out of touch. Political corruption had taken over.

**III. I know this sounds very familiar, and that’s the whole point. Things are bad now, but they have been this way before.**

- A. It was in these conditions that a powerful and Godly man emerged. He was called ‘John the Baptist’ (and now you know the time I speak of....)
  1. John the Baptist was a rough and rugged character and “unconventional,” certainly. Most truth-tellers are....
  2. He was most likely affiliated with a small group of Godly people known as the Essenes. They are those that hung out in the remote desert wilderness in an area known as Qumran.
  3. They were ostracized and persecuted by the popular religious system for speaking the truth, and so they found community and fellowship with like-minded people.
  4. This was the group that had possession of, and studied those documents which we know today as The Dead Sea Scrolls.
  5. As the Essenes studied the prophecies of Scripture responsibly, they properly anticipated the arrival of Jesus Christ.
  
- B. The life and activities of John the Baptist.
  1. A time came when John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus’ ministry as a “voice in the wilderness” (***Cf. John 1:23***).
  2. His location, his message, and his coarse apparel make the case that he proclaimed the core beliefs of the Essene community to the masses.
  3. He embraced a sustainable insect diet long before today’s globalists did. He was noted for eating locusts and wild honey.
  4. John the Baptist was a strong man with equally strong convictions. He was blunt, and he stated the plain truth plainly.
  5. He didn’t think twice about confronting the hypocritical religious leaders, and calling them a “brood of vipers” (***Cf. Matthew 3:7***).
  6. His straight talk and no-nonsense approach attracted truth-seekers. The masses were hungry for the truth, and John the Baptist was delivering it. He had many followers and disciples.

7. He also confronted the corrupt political system of that time the very same way he confronted the corrupt religious system. As we will see, that got him into a lot of trouble.
- C. It's important to understand that John the Baptist and Jesus were probably cousins. Their mothers were somehow related.
1. The Bible states that their mothers visited each other, and chances are good that John the Baptist and Jesus knew each other as they were growing up together.
  2. Maybe they even played together as children. This is not an unreasonable assumption.
  3. When the time came for John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus' ministry, he did this because he had a right view of Jesus.
  4. John said of Him, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (***Cf. John 3:30***). John the Baptist grasped the proper priorities and how things needed to be.
  5. IMPORTANT: None of this was an act. John the Baptist was a man of God who had a passion for proclaiming the truth and for living it out.
  6. His extraordinary ministry and exemplary character were affirmed when Jesus said of him that there was "...none greater" (***Cf. Luke 7:28***).
  7. To be sure, John the Baptist was the real deal. His character and his message showed he was a great man with a solid spiritual foundation.
- D. It is difficult to know how much time John the Baptist actually had with Jesus Christ.
1. There *was* that special occasion when John baptized Jesus. (***Cf. Matthew 3:13-17***).
  2. John's character and humility showed because he had felt that Jesus should have baptized *him* instead.
  3. In their adult years, it seems they had little face-to-face contact. As each of their ministries grew, it seems they had less time together.
  4. We DO know John the Baptist publicly confronted Herod Antipas for the king's sins (***Cf. Matthew 14:1-13***). As I stated earlier, it was dangerous to confront the political system of that day with the truth.
  5. This had resulted in John the Baptist's arrest, imprisonment, and ultimately his beheading. Truth has never been welcome.
  6. This event happened early in the ministry of Jesus Christ, so there was no opportunity for further contact between the two cousins after that point.

**IV. It is here that I want to start looking at John the Baptist's reactions. It's here that we see ourselves in him.**

- A. It is after John's arrest that we learn of his questions and doubts about Jesus Christ.
1. In a desperate situation with his life on the line, in a time of great trial and uncertainty, John the Baptist faced gnawing questions.
  2. Reports of Jesus had found their way into John's cell, and news of Jesus' ministry had worked its way into the fabric of John's deepest frustrations.

3. Time had passed since that glorious baptism, and Jesus' ministry was now flourishing while John's had abated.
  4. John's disciples fed him bits and pieces of information as they were able to, and it's fair to say these reports reinforced the misgivings John had of Jesus.
- B. You see, the ministries and activities of Jesus and John were very different.
1. It's not beyond reason to suggest John had certain expectations of Jesus that, by this point, had aroused John's concerns.
  2. For example, John's choices had set him apart from the crowd while Jesus' choices and intentions were to be with the people.
    - a. John the Baptist and his disciples fasted often, but Jesus and his disciples ate and drank with sinners (**Cf. Matthew 11:18-19**).
    - b. John performed no signs in his earthly ministry (**Cf. John 10:41**), but Jesus and his disciples performed miracles of every kind (**Cf. Matthew 9:35, 10:1**).
    - c. John lived reclusively, however Jesus was a very public person who was often surrounded by enormous crowds of people.
  3. While John was sitting in prison, captive most of all to his own frustrations and disappointments. It's not hard to imagine the questions that may have gone through John's mind.
    - a. "If Jesus was really the Messiah as he himself had announced, then why wasn't Jesus doing more?"
    - b. "Why was Jesus not getting down to the business of establishing His kingdom and burning up the wicked with unquenchable fire?" (**Cf. Matthew 3:12**).
    - c. "Was he here in prison because Jesus was powerless to do anything about the situation?"
    - d. "Was Jesus really going to arrive the way John had said he would?"
  4. When John the Baptist's strength failed and he could resist his own insecurities no longer, he sent some of his disciples to confront Jesus and to ask Him a question.
    - a. "Are you the promised Messiah or should we be looking for someone else?" (**Cf. Matthew 11:2-3**).
    - b. (Let me put that another way): "Jesus, I expected something of you that you've not done. You've not ARRIVED the way I thought you would. Have I misunderstood anything here?"
  5. The question is a revealing one because it shows John had expectations of Jesus' arrival that were unfulfilled.
  6. John wanted to know if he'd been misled. Was Jesus their *only* hope or was somebody else going to come along that was a better fit for the job? Was Jesus Christ really going to take care of all these problems, was He really going to fulfill His promises, or what?

7. John the Baptist's question shows he was unsure, doubtful, and worn down. It's the same way you and I have felt from time to time....and, maybe the way we feel right now!
  8. Jesus sent John's disciples back to John with an answer, but it was hardly the one John the Baptist was seeking.
    - a. Jesus challenged John to consider the evidence of His miracles **(Matthew 11:5-6)**.
    - b. It's interesting to note that all of those miracles were prophesied in the Old Testament as ones that the Messiah would fulfill.
    - c. The only one on that list that was not part of Scripture is the statement that "the dead would be raised."
      - However, in the writings of the Essenes that John the Baptist had also studied, it was stated there that the Messiah would 'raise the dead.'
      - Jesus knew John had studied those things, and so He reminded John of what he was supposed to know.
    - d. And then Jesus added, "...blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."
    - e. In other words, Jesus exhorted John to cling to the truth of Old Testament Scripture.
    - f. He did not give John a simple "yes" or "no" answer, but he left him hanging a bit.
    - g. Jesus responded to John's heart instead of his mind. John's heart was the seat of his faith, the very same way OUR hearts are the seat of our faith.
- C. It's easy to sit here and be the armchair quarterback. It's easy to look in the rearview mirror.
1. We can say John the Baptist was wrong for the ideas he had about how and when Jesus needed to operate, but, honestly, we're not much different.
    - a. We expect God to work in certain ways as well. If God does not fulfill our expectations, we also get disappointed.
    - b. We expect Jesus to show up, and to ARRIVE the way we think He should. We see the problems in our world as John saw the problems in his.
    - c. We see corruption and depravity as having the upper hand, we see the religious system utterly failing, and we see religious leaders blind to Biblical Prophecy and to truth. All of this is what John also saw.
  2. We may not like to admit it, but it's easy for us to think that if our God is really the God He says He is, then we have a right to expect something different from Him.
    - a. And this is why we too get frustrated when things don't happen WHEN and HOW we think they should.

- b. It's easy for you and I to fall into the trap of thinking that Jesus needs to conform to our expectations of Him.
- c. This is especially the case when we see prophetic events taking shape, when we see the truth of Scripture being made clear in our own time, and when we know what's coming.
- d. It's easy to expect Jesus to COME when we think He ought to.

**V. What are the applications here for you and I?**

- A. First we're not always going to get the answers we want the way we want them.
  - 1. I feel it's likely that John died with some of his questions unanswered.
  - 2. That doesn't mean that Jesus didn't understand John's fears, it doesn't mean God let him down, and it doesn't mean John's faith wasn't real.
  - 3. It means John was human, and because he was human, his reactions TO and his expectations OF Jesus Christ were imperfect, the same way yours and mine can be as well.
  - 4. But in our fears and concerns, Jesus reminds you and I – the SAME WAY He reminded John the Baptist, to rest on the assurances of Scripture.
  - 5. Yes, things are horrible in this world right now. Yes, we can see prophetic tensions ratcheting up, and yes, we can see everything falling into place for the Rapture, but we MUST rest on the assurances of God's Word.
  
- B. Secondly, we need to be aware of our natural tendency to look at these present circumstances we are in and - - - "think not." (LET ME EXPLAIN)
  - 1. John the Baptist, was appointed and anointed to prepare the Way of the Lord.
  - 2. He preached with a passion and conviction that showed he knew the truth, which caused many to repent.
  - 3. Jesus called John the greatest prophet born of women. So we know his ministry was sound.
  - 4. John was graced to baptize Jesus Christ. He saw the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove come and land upon Jesus. Then he heard God speak, "This is my beloved Son in Whom I'm well pleased." **Matthew 3:17**
  - 5. Yet despite all of what John saw and did, there came a point where he was imprisoned, where he faced profound trials, and where he doubted.
  - 6. IMPORTANT: There came a point where John began to question himself, to wonder, and to maybe "think not."
  
- C. Third, Jesus told us there would come a time He would come and receive us unto Himself. He said it would be at "an hour you do not expect." In other words, when we "think not."
 

NOTE: There is a significant parallel here to ponder:

  - 1. Right now there is a lot of bad news: there are so many examples of corruption and deceit taking over the world, there is so much heresy and 'lukewarmness' in the church, and there is so much pending horror and devastation coming down the pipeline that perfectly aligns with Bible Prophecy.

2. All of this can easily cause us to question, as John did, "Are you really coming Jesus?"
  - a. I mean, huge wars are pending.
  - b. Prices are going up at the pump and they're going to get a whole lot worse.
  - c. Inflation is out of control and our gov't keeps stoking those fires with foolish policies designed to weaken this nation.
  - d. Truth is being squelched and we have a two-tiered justice system.
  - e. They want to federalize abortion, perform genital mutilation on our kids, and advance a transgender agenda.
  - f. Our illegitimate President is using the FBI as his personal gestapo to take out his political rival.
  - g. Our nation's leaders are abandoning Israel and coddling terrorists.
  - h. Our world's leaders are attacking our food supplies while they are strong-arming us to accept a vaccine lie.
  - i. Economies are on the brink of total collapse.
  - j. "What about this, Lord? What about that? Lord these are scary times!"
  - k. You begin to question, and to even doubt, "Lord are you going to leave us here?"
3. This is where Jesus' words come into the picture, "I AM COMING AT AN HOUR YOU THINK NOT" (*Cf. Matthew 24:44 / KJV*)
4. Increasingly, I don't believe that means a particular time when your attention is given to something else: like at a time your focused on the car in front of you during heavy traffic, or when you are trying to decide between two items on sale, or when you are rooting for your favorite football team.
5. I don't think it means a time when you just aren't thinking about His return, but rather at a time we are seriously tempted to be overwhelmed by our fears and we begin to "think not."
6. It's the same thing John the Baptist struggled with in prison.
7. You might be someone who has been greatly convinced of the Lord's imminent return. You've read and studied everything you can about Bible Prophecy.
8. You can't get enough of it. You even attend a community-wide Sunday School to learn more about that stuff!
9. You've done your part to prepare the way like John the Baptist did: warning, sharing and working in the harvest fields proclaiming "Jesus is Coming!"
10. You've read, you've studied, and you have made your convictions clear; that "these are the last days."
11. But now, your insecurities scream, "Are they really? I'm starting to 'think not,' Jesus."
12. It was during a time John "thought not," that Jesus sent him word and encouraged John to cling to the truth of the Scriptures.



13. I believe God is wanting to encourage us the same way. IF we enter a time we begin to doubt and to wonder and to "think not", then THAT is the time we need to "Look Up!" for He IS coming.

**My prayer for myself and each of you is we will stand firm on the assurances and promises of God's Word. It is made clear there that we ARE in the last days, that He is coming soon, and He will certainly come at a time we 'think not.'**