**Lesson: The Beginning of Sorrows**

The text for this lesson is taken primarily from the Olivet Discourse, a sermon Jesus preached while He stood on the Mount of Olives (MAT 24; MAR 13; LUK 21). Jesus was responding to followers who asked how they would know when His return was nigh. Like always, people want signs, then and now; that is, we prefer to know in advance what to expect. Of course, the Lord wants you to get ready without delay, which is why the actual timeline of the Second Coming is deliberately imprecise (MAT 25:13; 2 PE 3:10). Enough information is provided in the Holy Bible to suggest it can happen soon. While many theories exist concerning eschatology, it is not the intent of this study to entertain any particular one. However, a list of episodes associated with the last days is provided at the conclusion of this lesson; keep in mind it is not an exhaustive list, and chronology can only be approximated.

* MAT 24:5–34; MAR 13:30; LUK 21:32 ~ Jesus said, “Many shall come in my name, claiming to be me, and deceiving many. There will be wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes. These are only the beginning of sorrows. They will capture you, torture you, and kill you; you will be hated for following me. People will offend, betray, and despise each other. When you see the abomination of desolation stand in the holy place, as prophesied by Daniel, escape into the mountains. There will be great tribulation, worse than ever before or ever again. Then a sign in heaven will appear. The whole earth will be in mourning when the Son of God returns in a cloud, with all His power and glory. This generation will not pass away until these things have happened.”
* LUK 17:26–30 ~ It will be like the days of Noah and Lot.
* 2 TI 3:13 ~ Evil men and seducers will get progressively worse, deceiving and being deceived.
* REV 22:18–20 ~ For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, that if anyone adds to these words, God will add unto that person the plagues mentioned in this book. If anyone subtracts from the words of this prophecy, God will take away their name from the Book of Life, and they will not share in the inheritance. He who testified of these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Let it be so: come Lord Jesus.

Apparently, there will be a period of great sorrow the likes of which nobody will have experienced before or after (MAT 24:21; LUK 17:26). Sorrowful and evil times have occurred throughout history, affecting both righteous and unrighteous people. In the Old Testament, God obliterated wicked people during the times of Noah and Lot. God instructed the Israelites to annihilate pagan nations when taking possession of lands east of the Jordan River. The New Testament documents troubled times for Jews and Christians oppressed and persecuted by the Roman Empire, which would eventually collapse into pieces like every world empire before it. Certainly, it was a sorrowful time for Jesus’s followers who witnessed Him being tortured to death, yet joyful when he reappeared alive.

God’s vengeance will rain upon the wicked and the unbelievers when Christ returns in judgment; this will be a very bad end for those who rejected Christ. Prior to His return, the burdens on planet Earth will get increasingly crueler. If you ask me, it’s getting pretty bad already, the global sufferings, trials, disasters, and chaos. It is a gloomy prospect knowing that such things will multiply as we get closer to the end.

* NUM 32:22–23 ~ When the land is subdued before the Lord, you can return guiltless and free before God and Israel. This land will be your possession before the Lord. But if you do not comply you will have sinned against the Lord and you can be sure that your sin will find you out.
* ISA 28:15–19 ~ All covenants of death and agreements with hell will be null and void. Those that trusted in these lies will be trampled by the overwhelming scourge that passes through.
* DAN 9:27 ~ During the last half of the week [often interpreted as half of seven years of tribulation], the abomination that causes desolation will continue, until the terrible end that awaits is poured out upon them.
* JOE 2:28–32 ~ I will pour out my Spirit on humankind. Your sons and daughters will prophesy and will see visions; old men will dream dreams. There will be signs in the heavens and on earth: blood, fire, and smoke. The sun will turn dark and the moon will turn to blood, before that great and terrible day of the Lord. All who call upon the Lord will be delivered.
* ZEP 1:14–15 ~ The great day of the Lord is coming quickly, when mighty men will cry. It is a day of wrath, trouble, and distress, of destruction and desolation, of gloom, clouds, and darkness.
* REV 6:12–17 ~ There was a great earthquake; the sun became black and the moon became like blood. Stars fell from the sky. They tried to hide in the rocks and caves, praying that the mountain would bury them, for the great day of God’s wrath had come upon them.

So, how exactly can we prepare for the culmination of such unfathomable events? Well, start with God’s Word and end with it. God’s Word is Truth so spread the Word! God tells us everything we need to know and He provides everything we need to survive (MAT 6:31–34). God the Father spoke aloud (MAT 17:5), “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him!” Whenever you study God’s Word, you are listening.

* ECC 1:17–18 ~ I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. I perceived this as a vexation of spirit. For with much wisdom comes much grief; and he that increases knowledge increases in sorrow.
* ISA 14:3 ~ It will come to pass, the day the Lord gives you rest from your sorrow and fear and from the hard bondage forced upon you, that you will speak a proverb against Babylon, “See how the oppressor and the golden city have ceased!”
* ISA 51:11 ~ The redeemed of the Lord will return to Zion with singing; everlasting joy will be upon their heads, gladness in their hearts, while sorrow and mourning flee.
* JER 51:29 ~ The land will tremble with sorrow; for every purpose of the Lord will befall Babylon, making the land desolate and without inhabitants.
* JOH 16:20–22 ~ Jesus said, “Truly I say, you will weep and lament while the world rejoices; you will experience much sorrow. But that sorrow will turn to great joy. Just like a woman in the throes of childbirth feels profound joy when her baby is born: she does not remember the anguish but rejoices for the new life being brought into the world. You may have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your heart will jump for joy, and nobody can take that from you.”
* 2 CO 7:9–10 ~ I am glad that you were sorry for your sins and repented. Spiritual sorrow for one’s sins works repentance unto salvation; but the sorrow of the world works death.
* REV 17:5,9,15 ~ On her head was written: Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and all earthly abominations. This is the great city that sits on seven mountains and over many waters, nations, and peoples.
* REV 18:2,10 ~ The angel cried, “Babylon has become the habitation of devils and every foul spirit. That mighty city will receive judgment in one hour.”
* REV 21:4 ~ God will wipe away your tears; He will remove all death, sorrow, crying, and pain. Every unpleasant thing from your previous life will be gone forever.

One can make a reasonable case that the world has entered the time of sorrows, implying the end has begun. If true, things will get continually worse from here on out. Thankfully, God will bring His people home prior to pouring out seven vials of wrath at the finale.

* JER 30:7 ~ That will be a great time (of tribulation); there will be no others like it. It is the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.
* DAN 12:1 ~ Michael the great prince will stand for God’s people. There will be a time of tribulation worse than ever before or ever again, but God’s elect will be delivered, all whose names are written in the Book of Life.
* 1 CO 15:51–52,54 ~ Here is a mystery of God: We will not all sleep (die) but we will all be changed. Suddenly, when the last trumpet sounds, Christ’s own, whether dead or alive, will arise without corruption and be changed. Hence, the corruptible will have become incorruptible and the mortal will have become immortal. Then the statement “death is swallowed up in victory” will be true.
* 1 TH 4:16–17 ~ The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with a blast from the trumpet of God. Then the dead in Christ will rise first. Those who remain alive in Christ will rise to join the others in the clouds, meeting the Lord in the sky. Those chosen by Christ will live with Him forevermore.
* REV 20:4–6,13–15 ~ I (John) saw thrones, and sitting on them were judges. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony of Jesus, who had not worshipped the beast or its image, nor received its mark on their foreheads or hands. They came to life again and reigned with Christ one thousand years. This was the first resurrection. The rest of the dead did not live again until after the thousand years. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection for they will not be victims of the second death. At the second resurrection the rest of the souls were raised to be judged by God. Death and Hell, and those not recorded in the Book of Life, were cast into the Lake of Fire; this was the second death.

The following list of end times events is based on a consolidation of relevant scripture (refer to Barber, 2020a, 2020b). Jesus could return in your lifetime, so you might experience many of them. Arguably, many of these things already are taking place, indicating we indeed have entered a significant time of sorrows, and perhaps the beginning of the end.

Wars and rumors of wars

Earthquakes, tornadoes (tectonic activity)

Floods (including tsunamis, hurricanes)

Pestilence, disease (plagues, pandemics)

Christians are hated and persecuted

Worldwide famine, hunger

False prophets proliferate

Lawlessness and disorder

Antichrist arrives on scene

Rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem

Corruption in the church

Synagogues of Satan

Global economy, society

Sealing of 144,000 (mark of Christ)

Mark of the Beast

Gog, Magog (coalition of Mideast nations)

Final empire of evil (New Babylon)

Wicked generation

Fake miracles

Abomination of Desolation

Two witnesses prophesy

Beast comes back to life

Worst of times

Economic collapse

Judgments (war, famine, plagues, beasts)

Global war

Natural disasters abound

Uncommon celestial occurrences

Mass death, martyrdom

Depleted resources, rations

Poisoned water, air

Heavenly signs, wonders

Evil spirits, demons

Stinging creatures

Cavalry of 200,000,000

First Resurrection

Rapture of saints

Armageddon

Vials of wrath

New Babylon falls

Judgment Day

Millennial Reign

Second Resurrection

Second Death, Lake of Fire

Peruse the list above and check the number of items which have happened or are happening now. This exercise should raise your level of awareness profoundly. Hopefully, you will be compelled to repent of your sins more sincerely, study the scriptures more diligently, proclaim the truth more boldly, serve others more compassionately, and talk to, worship, praise, and thank God more frequently.

* PSA 51:10–12 ~ Create in me a clean heart, Lord, and renew an upright spirit within me. Don’t remove me from your presence and don’t take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit.
* ROM 12:1–2 ~ I implore you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is a reasonable response to His love. Do not conform to the ways of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, and you will be able to determine what is good, acceptable, and perfect according to God’s will.
* 2 CO 4:16 ~ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we continue to deteriorate, yet inwardly we are constantly renewed.

By Andrew Barber (Posted 03/01/2022)

References

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