

Signs of the Times

Bible Prophecy, Part 2

Summary for Teachers

Theme

Watch for the signs of the times!—Matthew 24 class about the signs of the times, plus a brief overview of the future from now through eternity.

Aim

To give the students the faith and conviction that we're living in the Time of the End because of the signs that Jesus gave that have been fulfilled. To encourage them to watch for the signs of the times. To help them discern what's happening in the world and around them locally; to look at developments from the perspective of how God sees them, rather than just drinking in what the media puts out without question. To give them an overall picture of the future as the Bible describes it.

Roundup

Prayer and Opening Activity (10 minutes)

Prayer

Praise Time

[Optional] Songs

Class Section 1: Signs of the End, from Matthew 24 (70 minutes)

Matthew 24:1–14—Jesus gives the signs of His coming

The signs of the end: getting fulfilled!

Deceivers and false prophets

Wars and rumors of wars

Civil wars (nation against nation)

Famines

Pestilences

Earthquakes and other natural disasters

Persecution of God's people

Love of many growing cold

Gospel preached in all the world

Verses 15–21: The Antichrist one world government and the Great Tribulation

The Great Tribulation

Watch out!

Jesus returns!

Keep watching the signs!

Quick quiz: What are the signs of the times that Jesus told us to watch out for?

Class Section 2: What's Ahead, In a Nutshell! (15 minutes)

[Option 1] Show parts of the video *The Final Stand*

[Option 2] Chronology of the future
 Jesus Returns!
 The Resurrection and the Rapture
 Rewards
 The Wrath of God upon Earth
 The Millennium
 The Battle of Gog and Magog
 Great White Throne Judgement
 New Heaven and New Earth
 Closing Activity and Prayer (25 minutes)
 God's love for the lost
 Our role in the Endtime
 Discussion
 Prayer

Get Prepared

- For most of this class we do a study on the Endtime based principally on Matthew 24. In order to keep things straightforward and fairly simple, almost all verses to read are in that chapter.
- In the section on “Signs of the Times,” there are many different examples of how these signs are coming to pass. You should balance the time between explaining some of these examples, and having the students offer their own examples. You want them to participate.
- Before the class, read over the examples to be familiar with the information. Then, during the class, although you can read or explain some of the examples, you should also try to get some discussion going with your students, and have them offer examples of fulfillments that they’ve seen themselves.
- Of course, when you get into listing the ways that the “Signs of the Times” are being fulfilled, it is endless! We have included much more material in this class than you will have time for. You shouldn’t try to read all of the examples or the class will take too long. Read those that you think will interest your students.
- If possible, tell the examples of fulfillments in your own words rather than just reading them.
- A number of these examples are also included in the Study Notes book.
- You should bear in mind that the main aim of this class is to help the students believe that we are living in the Endtime, and give them enough information so that they, too, can learn to discern the signs of the times. Don’t worry about them remembering every detail of what you tell them and the various examples and statistics. It is more important that they learn the names of the signs than the details of how they are coming to pass. For instance, the fact that “wars and rumors of wars” is a sign of the end is important to remember; the number of wars fought in the last century is merely a detail, etc.
- In the second part of the class, depending on how much time you’ve spent on Matthew 24, you can either: Show them all or parts of *The Final Stand* video, or give a brief overview of the future.
- Statistics in this class are mostly from the late 1990s. Even if some are already outdated, they serve to illustrate the points. If you have updated and more current statistics and examples, use them instead. If you have examples that are more localized, it is fine to use those rather than what is here.
- Make sure you leave sufficient time to teach the last section of the class, “Closing activity.” During this time you’ll be reassuring the students of the Lord’s love for everyone—that His plan is that none should be lost and that all should come to know Him and His love and eternal salvation. When the verses talk about the fate of the wicked, this is balanced with our knowledge of how much He loves everyone and all He does to win people into His Kingdom. This should help the students focus on the Lord being loving and merciful, and not only a God of judgment.
- The last section of the class also includes some faith-building verses about the Lord’s protection upon His children during the Great Tribulation. It is important that the students leave the class

with faith and not fearful of the future. Be sure you leave enough time to teach this section adequately.

■ Optional extra activity:

Invite the students for a showing of Countdown to Armageddon and/or the sequel Beyond Armageddon if they have not already seen these videos.

■ Related material in *Activated* magazines:

Activated Issue #1, pages 10–11, “The Future Foretold”

Activated Issue #4, pages 10–11, “The Beast Is Yet to Come”

Activated Issue #5, pages 10–11, “The Mark of the Beast”

Activated Issue #10, pages 6–7, “Heavenly Victory in the Great Tribulation”

Student Reading Material

Optional: Any of these Endtime posters: *The Final Signs of the End*, *Watch out for 666, Come!*, *The King's Return*.

Optional: *The Final Stand* (Video)

Optional: *The Lion, Dragon and the Beast* (Audio cassette or CD and/or Poster)

Prayer and Opening Activity

10 minutes

► Prayer

① Encourage one of the students to pray for the class.

► Praise Time

① Have a round of Praise Time with everyone participating. You could use verses to praise the Lord (see the set of “Praise Verses”) or pick another method.

► [Optional] Songs

♪ Select and sing some songs from the “Endtime Song Sheet.”

Class Section 1: Signs of the End, from Matthew 24

70 minutes

① Remember to try to get the students to participate when you discuss the various signs and have them offer examples as well, rather than just reading what is here.

① Pick and choose from the “optional” examples. Don't try to read them all or the class will be far too long!

① The students should already have some background knowledge of the Endtime subject, either from reading the *Activated* magazines (which each contain a section on the Endtime) and/or from attending a Preparatory Meeting. Therefore, although there is a lot of information in the following pages, you

may find it quite easy to teach, and each focus point can be dealt with fairly briefly. Let the students' interest in a particular topic be a guide to how much detail you get into.

► **Matthew 24:1–14—Jesus gives the signs of His coming**

Matthew 24:1–2—Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. (2) And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

The disciples were bragging to Jesus about the Temple, what a beautiful building complex it was that King Herod built. He told them it would be destroyed, and we learned in an earlier class how this prediction was fulfilled so specifically. (See “Destruction of the Temple” in Bible Knowledge, Part 1 [Class 6a].)

Matthew 24:3—Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

The Mount of Olives is a little hill just outside the walls of Jerusalem.

They thought, “My goodness, when the Temple is destroyed, that must be when You’re coming back and the world is going to be destroyed!” They didn’t realize that the Temple was going to be destroyed only 40 years later by the Romans, and it would still be over two thousand years before the end of the age!

Matthew 24:4—And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you.”

Watch out! There are a lot of preachers and teachers who give all kinds of funny stories and explanations and interpretations of these things. You’d better stick to the Bible! Stick to what Jesus says right here.

Matthew 24:5–11—For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. (6) And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. (7) For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. (8) All these are the beginning of sorrows. (9) Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. (10) And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. (11) Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

► **The Signs of the End: Getting fulfilled!**

The disciples wanted to know, “When’s the end of the world going to be?” Jesus described what would happen before His return. Of course, we’ve experienced the things that Jesus described in these verses—the disasters, the sorrows, the persecutions—for the last 2000 years! But the scale and intensity with which these verses are being fulfilled has increased dramatically and that is significant. Let’s look at some examples.

► **Deceivers and false prophets**

vs. 5—For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.

vs. 11, 24—Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (24) For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

The Bible tells us that if people willfully reject God’s truth, they will be given “strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.”

2 Thessalonians 2:10–11—They did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (11) And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.

When we refuse the truth, there is nothing left to believe but a lie! This is why much of the world today is wide open for deceivers and false prophets. It was estimated in the 1990s by a

Syracuse University professor who researched the contemporary religious situation in America that there are over 2,000 practicing gurus calling themselves Christ!

Not only are many people unknowingly falling for Satan's deceptions, increasing numbers are following Satanism. Rick Hatfield, director of Brylin Hospital's adult and adolescent inpatient chemical dependency treatment facility near Buffalo, New York, warns, "Satanism is one of the greatest and most prevalent threats facing kids today."

1 Timothy 4:1—Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

Youth involvement in the occult and witchcraft has been attributed to lack of spirituality in the churches. The Manchester [England] Guardian Weekly reported in the late 1990s that there are an estimated 80,000 witches in England.

The growth has been called a "renaissance in witchcraft," and there are now open schools in witchcraft that teach "psychic self-defense" and the history of witchcraft. "Pagan power" is similarly on the increase in the U.S. There are about 2 million Americans who adhere to some form of paganism.

There are many striking statistics to show how people are falling away from the Christian faith. Here are a few examples:

Among churchgoing Anglicans (Church of England), only half believe in the Virgin Birth and almost a third of the clergy don't believe it either! Only 2% of the population worships at church each Sunday.

In Germany, about 20% of people who call themselves Protestant and 10% of Catholics in Germany are atheists (Readers Digest).

[Optional] Falling away from true faith (News clips from the 1990s)

Germany (*Religion Today*) German churches are facing a "fall into insignificance," according to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. Churches are losing members in droves, political leaders ignore the moral admonitions of clergy, and Christian values are having less impact on society, reported *Idea*, an evangelical Christian news service in Germany. According to a recent poll, only 37% of the German population thinks the church should teach moral values. The German public believes the police, political parties, and the environmental organization Greenpeace are more qualified than churches to pass along moral values.

England (*The Sunday Times*) More than 70 serving Anglican priests are members of an organization that does not believe in the literal truth of the Bible, the existence of God, or the resurrection.

England (*The London Times*) Almost a third of Anglican clergy believe that the Virgin Birth is a legend or are unsure if it is true. Among churchgoing Anglicans, about half believe that it happened. The Church of England's attendance figures have fallen so sharply that less than 2% of the population now worships at church each Sunday, and only 1% regularly take communion.

Canada (*Religion Today*) Many Canadians have left Christianity—or simply ignore it as irrelevant. In 1991, 82% of Canadians identified in some way with the Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox faiths. By 1996, the figure had fallen to 68%.

Europe (*Washington Post Foreign Service*) Late-century Europe can easily be called the most godless quarter on earth. More than half of Europe's citizens still profess to be Catholics, while nearly a third identify themselves as Protestants. Yet few attend church regularly.

[Optional] The spirit of the age

Popular culture is often linked to a post-modern spirit of the age—one in which ideas of right and wrong and moral sense are simply choices individuals make.

"We had a reporter recently call to ask if genocide could be categorized as something 'wrong,'" says John Seel of the Postmodernism Project at the University of Virginia. "What you see these days is a total lack of any authority in intellectual life. Everything is just okay as long as you think it is."

☛ *Optional discussion: Discuss changes in your own country. What have the students observed as far as a "falling away" from faith and people following false religions?*

► Wars and rumors of wars

vs. 6—And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars...

The world has never been completely free from the scourge of war, but no period in all of history has witnessed the escalation of wars as has the 20th century. The International Red Cross estimates that over 100 million people were killed in wars during that century. The century came to a close with a third of the world's 193 nations embroiled in conflict. In 1999 alone there were 65 armed conflicts!

Since World War II, which was supposed to be “the war to end all wars,” there have been over 130 major wars (conflicts resulting in over 1,000 deaths a year), as well as hundreds of smaller conflicts, armed rebellions, and revolutions. These 130 wars have killed more than 23 million people directly and another 20 million through famine and other war-related disruptions.

[Optional] War victims in the 20th Century

Worldwatch News Release

Three times as many people—110 million—fell victim to war in the 20th century as in all the wars from the first century A.D. to 1899. And 70 percent of all war casualties since World War II have been civilians, rising to more than 90 percent in the 1990s.

[Optional] World's conflicts killed 100,000 in 1999

Agence France-Presse

At least 100,000 people have died in armed conflicts in the past year, the majority of them in Sub-Saharan Africa, the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) said in its annual report [released 10/00] on the world military balance.

Wars and civil unrest continued unabated in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, notably Colombia, and Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia. The Caucasus region, notably Chechnya, and Central Asia were the scenes of unresolved and persistent conflict, it added.

However, around 60 percent of the death toll came from Sub-Saharan Africa, where conflicts were recorded between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in Central Africa, Sierra Leone and southern Sudan.

There are now 14 ongoing UN peacekeeping operations around the world using the services of 28,900 troops from 38 countries—nearly three times as much as a year earlier.

Meanwhile, sales in the world arms trade in 1999 were estimated at around 53.4 billion dollars. Global military expenditures were about 809 billion dollars.

The U.S. remained the largest arms exporter with a 49.1 percent share of the global market.

[Optional] More Facts and figures on war

World Health Organization

Worldwide, there were some 19 million refugees and displaced persons in 2002—largely as a result of wars, political turbulence, civil conflict and social unrest (e.g. Afghanistan, the Balkans, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, East Timor, Somalia and Sudan). In such emergencies, malnutrition runs rampant, exponentially increasing the risk of disease and death.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute website

The 1991 Gulf War cost the Allies a half billion dollars a day, or about \$350,000 a minute. One fighter plane costs about \$25 million. One Tomahawk cruise missile costs \$1.3 million. One air-to-air missile costs \$800,000.

Translated into more relatable expenses, for the price of one Sparrow radar-guided missile, a school full of hungry children could eat lunch every day for five years.

World military expenditure in 2001 was \$839 billion. That means an astronomical 1.6 million dollars are spent worldwide on the military every minute! A \$30 billion, 10-year plan to provide clean water to the poor of the developing world would cost just thirteen days of military spending.

Total world military spending for 2001 of 839 billion dollars represents a significant proportion of world economic resources. As a global average it accounted for 2.6 per cent of world GDP and 137

dollars per capita. However, both economic resources and military expenditure are unevenly spread. The 15 major spenders account for over three-quarters of world military spending. Five countries account for over half. The United States accounts for 36 per cent, followed by Russia with 6 per cent and France, Japan and the UK with about 5 per cent each. The 63 countries in Africa and Latin America together accounted for 5 per cent of world military spending in 2001.

[Optional] The tragedy of war

At the Imperial War Museum in London, England, visitors are intrigued by a unique clock and digital counter. This clock does not keep time. Its purpose is to help people grasp the magnitude of a central feature of the past century—war. As the hand of the clock rotates, the counter adds another number to its tally every 3.31 seconds. Each number represents a man, woman, or child who has died as a result of war during the 20th century.

At midnight on December 31, 1999, the counting registered 100 million, a conservative estimate of the number of those who have died in war during the past 100 years.

Imagine, 100 million people! Yet that statistic reveals nothing about the terrors and pain experienced by the victims. Neither does it describe the suffering of the loved ones of those who died—the countless millions of mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, widows and orphans. What the statistic does tell us is this: The 20th century has been by far the most destructive century in all human history; its savagery is unparalleled.

The history of the 20th century also shows to what extent humans have become expert in the craft of killing. Throughout history the development of new weapons went slowly until the 20th century, which has produced an avalanche of weapons. When the first world war began in 1914, the armies of Europe included men on horseback, armed with lances. Today, with the help of satellite sensors and computerized guidance systems, missiles can deliver death to any part of the earth, with astonishing accuracy. The intervening years have seen the development and perfecting of guns, tanks, submarines, warplanes, biological and chemical weapons, and, of course, “the bomb.”

When the Cold War ended in 1989, many expressed confidence in a peaceful world order. Still, war continued. During the next seven years, an estimated 101 conflicts raged in various places. Most were wars not between states but within states. They were fought by opposing groups with unsophisticated weapons. In Rwanda, for example, much of the killing was done with machetes.

Often the modern battlefields are towns and villages, and there is little or no distinction between combatants and civilians. Michael Harbottle, director of the Center for International Peacebuilding, wrote: “Whereas in the past the causes of conflict may have been fairly predictable, today they are much more complex and much more difficult to control. The degree of violence that accompanies them is unbelievable and totally irrational. Civilian inhabitants are as much in the firing line as the fighters.” Such low-tech conflict shows little sign of fading away.

Meanwhile, in the rich nations of the world, high-tech weapon development continues apace. Sensors—whether deployed in the air, in space, in the ocean, or on the ground—enable a modern army to see more quickly and clearly than ever before, even in difficult terrain such as jungles. As the new technologies are perfected and integrated, “distance warfare” moves toward reality, enabling an army to see everything, hit everything, and destroy much that an enemy has.

In considering the prospect of future war, we should not forget the menacing presence of nuclear weapons. *The Futurist* magazine (1999) predicts: “The continuing proliferation of atomic weapons makes it increasingly likely that we shall have one or more atomic wars within the next 30 years. In addition, atomic weapons may be used by terrorists.”

What has frustrated efforts to achieve global peace? An obvious factor is that the human family is fragmented into nations and cultures that distrust, hate, or fear one another. There are conflicting values, perceptions, and goals. Furthermore, use of military power has for millennia been seen as a legitimate way to pursue national interests. After acknowledging this situation, a report from the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College stated: “To many, this implied that peace would only come with world government.”

► Civil wars (nation against nation)

vs. 7—For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...

The Greek word for “nation” originally used in this prophecy, “nation shall rise against nation,” is *ethnos*, which is more accurately translated “a race” or “a tribe.” Jesus was saying that ethnic groups would rise against each other—a prophecy dreadfully fulfilled in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and other trouble spots around the world.

The Associated Press (AP) reports that during the 20th century, the murders perpetrated by dominant clans or ethnic groups in nations against other clans or ethnic groups in their own countries have exceeded the deaths caused by wars with rivals outside their borders!

In the seven years following the end of the Cold War in 1989, an estimated 101 conflicts raged. Most were wars not between states but within states. They were fought by opposing groups with unsophisticated weapons. In Rwanda, for example, much of the killing was done with machetes.

[Optional] Deaths in civil wars (amongst people of the same country)

Compiled from articles in *AP*, *The Independent*, State Department, Center for Defense Information, CIA, *World Almanac*

Following is a list of death tolls or estimates in a sampling of civil conflicts fought in the 1990s:

Algeria: 75,000, 1992–98: An insurgency touched off when the army canceled elections the Islamic Salvation Front was poised to win. Algeria is getting its first civilian chief of state since 1965, but the election brought charges of fraud.

Burundi: 150,000-250,000, 1993–99: Tutsis and Hutus have been fighting since the 1993 assassination by Tutsis of the first democratically elected president—a Hutu—and a coup in 1996 that brought a Tutsi government to power.

Colombia: 1,200 civilians, 1998: Thousands die yearly in violence perpetrated by drug traffickers, leftist rebels, right-wing paramilitary squads, and wayward army soldiers in a decades-long struggle. The country’s ombudsman says civilian massacres rose 16 percent in 1997, to 1,200, and more than 300,000 people were displaced by violence.

Guatemala: 200,000, 1960–96: Civil war ended with a peace agreement between leftist rebels and the government.

Kosovo: 2,000, 1998: A death toll that has risen to unknown heights since Serbs intensified their ethnic purge of Kosovars and NATO started bombing to stop the repression. Mass graves have been reported in Kosovo. NATO has acknowledged bombing a passenger train and possibly a refugee convoy; Serbs said about 75 died as a result.

Liberia: 200,000, 1989–2003: More than 1 million now displaced within country, more than 300,000 fled to neighboring countries. Rebel leader Charles Taylor launched Liberia into conflict leading an insurgency to overthrow then-President Samuel Doe. Taylor won presidency in 1997, after leading a ruinous seven-year civil war. Since then rebels have battled to remove him.

Northern Ireland: 3,250, 1968–1998: Street clashes between Catholic protesters and Protestant police, leading in 1970 to the start of bombings and shootings by the IRA and then random killings by Protestant groups.

Rwanda: 500,000–1,000,000, 1994: A 90-day slaughter of Tutsis or moderate Hutus by soldiers, militia and others under the influence of the Hutu government, finally put down by Tutsi-led rebels.

Sierra Leone: 14,000, 1992–99: Continuing war between the Revolutionary United Front and the government, with the rebels backed by an ousted military junta and the government by a UN-led intervention force.

Spain: 800, 1961–99: Basque separatists broke a truce in their armed campaign for independence and resumed a campaign of assassinations and car bombings.

Sri Lanka: 57,000, 1983–99: Tamil rebels have been fighting the government for an independent homeland in the small island nation.

Sudan: 1.5 million, 1983–99. Rebels from the Christian and animist south have been fighting for autonomy from the Arab and Muslim north in a conflict marked by famine.

Turkey: 37,000, 1984–99: Kurdish rebels have been fighting for autonomy in southeast Turkey, using guerrilla bases in northern Iraq.

► Famines

vs. 7—There will be famines...

A famine is a drastic, wide-reaching shortage of food.

The WHO (World Health Organization) estimates that about 4 million people a year die of starvation, or about 30 people every minute.—That means, during the two hours that we are here together, about 3,600 people will have died of hunger!

“Some 40,000 hunger-related deaths occur every day, mostly in rural regions,” according to World Bank former vice president Ismail Serageldin.

It is estimated that one-third of the world is well-fed, one-third is under-fed, and one-third is starving. More than 800 million people are chronically undernourished (World Health Organization).

Water shortages in parts of the world in the next 25 years will pose the single greatest threat to food production and human health. 1.3 billion people worldwide have no access to clean water (World Bank).

The terrible irony is that the world can produce enough food to feed its expanding population. While some famines are caused by drought or other natural disasters, most starvation in the world today could be avoided were it not for man’s selfishness and inhumanity. War, embargoes, government corruption, and economic oppression are all symptoms of the real problem. While innocent children starve, some rich nations destroy millions of tons of food in order to keep prices artificially high.

[Optional] The coexistence of feast and famine

Los Angeles Times—1998

In the second half of the 20th century, famine no longer is a scourge of nature but results from war, politics and other misdeeds of man.

Thanks to breakthroughs in science and agriculture, the world now produces enough food to feed every man, woman and child on the planet. But hunger and starvation persist. And in many places, they appear to be worsening.

Despite a worldwide glut of food, 18 million people die of starvation, malnutrition and related causes every year, according to a newly released Johns Hopkins University study. And more than 800 million people are chronically undernourished, UN statistics show.

More often than not, the reasons for this cruel paradox—hunger in the midst of global plenty—have little to do with natural causes. Of the millions who go hungry every day, “we estimate that only 10% are victims of disaster,” said World Food Program Executive Director Catherine Bertini.

At 1997’s World Food Summit in Rome, a U.S. Department of Agriculture report identified some of the forces that create hunger: war and civil strife, misguided national policies, trade barriers such as crop subsidies, technology, environmental degradation, poverty, and gender inequality.

[Optional] Water crisis “likely to hit 40 countries”

South China Morning Post / Associated Press—1999

More than a billion people lack safe, clean water and the problem will worsen next century, experts say.

Most of the projected water shortages in 2025 would be in Africa and the Middle East, but India, parts of China, Peru, England and Poland would also be affected, said a newly formed commission that focuses on world water supplies.

The commission said the problem could afflict more than 40 countries in all. A United Nations analysis found that 1.4 billion people now lacked safe and reliable water. Water-related diseases kill from five million to seven million people annually, experts said. The UN said up to half of the population of the developing world suffered from such diseases at any given time.

The UN said shortages would affect 2.3 billion people, or 30 percent of the world’s population, in more than 40 nations by 2025.

Ismail Serageldin, chairman of the World Commission on Water, said, "Water is life. Shortage of fresh water is ... going to be one of the major problems of the 21st century."

[Optional] China disasters century's deadliest

AP—1999

China experienced three of the century's four deadliest weather-related disasters, two drought-induced famines that killed more than 29 million people and a Yangtze River flood that claimed 3.7 million lives.

Despite 11,000 deaths in Central America, 1998's Hurricane Mitch does not rank near the top of the century's deadliest incidents. Looking back over the century, experts of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found famine brought on by drought deadlier than storms or floods like the Yangtze disaster of 1931. Most of the famine deaths were in Asia. A 1907 episode killed more than 24 million Chinese. Also in China, the "New Famine" of 1936 killed an estimated 5 million Chinese, and a drought in 1941–2 more than 3 million.

► Pestilences

vs. 7—*And pestilences...*

Pestilences, also known as plagues: At least 30 previously unknown diseases have appeared globally since 1973, including HIV-AIDS, Hepatitis C, Ebola hemorrhagic fever and others.

Twenty well-known infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, and cholera have re-emerged or spread since 1973, some reappearing in "deadlier, drug-resistant forms." Less than 20 years ago the medical profession claimed victory over a wide array of bacterial and viral killers. But instead of fading, the cases of infectious diseases have skyrocketed throughout the '90s. Doctors now warn that the current resurgence of drug-resistant bacteria strains could prove to be more deadly than AIDS. Drug-resistant strains of microbes are having a deadly impact on the fight against tuberculosis, malaria, cholera, diarrhea, and pneumonia, which together kill more than 10 million people worldwide each year.

As AIDS continues its global rampage, the statistics have become staggering. UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Program on HIV / AIDS, in its "AIDS Epidemic Update" released in December 2002, stated that 5 million new HIV infections occurred that year. 3.1 million people died of AIDS in 2002, bringing the total of AIDS-related deaths to 6.4 million. As of the end of 2002, over 42 million people are living with HIV / AIDS.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says "around the world close to 14,000 every day are infected with HIV and the pandemic is getting worse."

In the 45 most affected countries, it is projected that, between 2000 and 2020, 68 million people will die prematurely as a result of AIDS. The projected toll is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa where 55 million additional deaths can be expected.

Aside from the above-mentioned plagues, there is, of course, cancer, which is considered non-infectious. Scientists estimate that about 80 percent of cancers are caused by environmental factors. Over 100 different kinds of cancer now kill over 6 million people every year.

[Optional] News Clips

Tuberculosis. (*Reuters*) TB infects a third of the earth's population, killing nearly 3 million people every year, spreading swiftly and freely through the air. Half the people infected don't realize they have the disease, which health authorities talk only of trying to control. Eradication is not even on the horizon. The World Health Organization estimates that more people will die from TB this year than in any other year in history.

Malaria. (*BBC*) It is estimated that at any time 2.5 billion people are at risk from malaria. It kills 3 million a year; 500 million are made very ill. Most cases occur in tropical Africa and Southeast Asia. According to recent studies, malaria is more prevalent today than it has been at any other period in history. More than 90 countries have malaria during all or part of the year, and at any given time, up to 300 million people are infected with the disease.

Sleeping sickness. (*CNN*) On the African continent, in the narrow band between the 15th parallels that bookend the equator, a tiny fly is jeopardizing the lives of 55 million people and could be responsible for one of the largest epidemics of this century. The bite of the tsetse fly can carry a parasite that will work its way through your body and, if left untreated, put you on course for a slow, agonizing and certain death. It's called the sleeping sickness. 25,000 new cases of sleeping sickness are diagnosed each year. Dr. Michaleen Richer of the International Medical Corps said the prevalence of sleeping sickness has risen by more than 15 percent. "This is an epidemic of really catastrophic proportions," Michaleen added.

Dengue fever. (*Reuters*) Scientists have warned that rising global temperatures could bring more than floods and severe weather—they may allow for the wider spread of tropical illnesses like dengue fever. The World Health Organization estimates that 2.5 billion people are currently at risk from dengue fever. More than 240,000 cases were reported in Brazil in 1997. Dengue fever killed 40 people in Venezuela in 1997, and infected 32,000. A recent outbreak in Fiji killed eight people and infected 6,500.

Pneumonia. (*MSNBC*) A new study shows that the bacterium called Streptococcus pneumoniae is penicillin-resistant in almost half of all cases. A few years ago doctors could always assume that penicillin would kill the pneumonia-causing organism. Now they always have to take into account the possibility that penicillin won't work. "When the bacterium enters the bloodstream, up to 20 percent of the people over age 65 may die of it," says Dr. Jay Cutler of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. "And mortality approaches 40 percent among those age 80 and over." But the bacteria do not strike only the elderly. The same germ is responsible for most childhood ear infections—which can spread to the blood and the brain if not stopped.

Bubonic plague. (*AP*) For the first time, scientists have found a strain of the plague that is resistant to all the antibiotics normally used to treat and prevent the deadly infectious disease. The plague, the Black Death that killed one-fourth of the European population in the 1300s, is spread by fleas that have bitten infected rats and other rodents or by sneezes and coughs from infected people. Plague is considered a re-emerging disease by the World Health Organization. The number of cases reported each year is growing, cases are cropping up in more places and epidemics happened in 1994 in East Africa, Madagascar, Peru and India.

Rift Valley Fever. (*BBC*) An outbreak of the hemorrhagic disease Rift Valley Fever is now estimated to have infected 89,000 people and killed more than 400 in northeastern Kenya and in Somalia. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN has categorized the outbreak as an international disaster because of fears that infected mosquitoes and animals may spread the disease to other countries.

Influenza. (*Electronic Telegraph*) The influenza virus has developed the ability to circumvent the human body's main defense against the disease, raising the prospect of a deadly new global outbreak, scientists have discovered. Dr Klaus Stohr, the leader of the World Health Organization's global influenza program, called the 1997 outbreak "the last warning from nature" that the world must prepare for a flu pandemic similar to that of 1918, when 50 million people died.

[Optional] Tuberculosis: Every second, someone on earth is infected

Awake! (May 22, 1999)

Tuberculosis (TB) is man's oldest infectious killer, and it remains such a serious health threat that the World Health Organization (WHO) compares it to a time bomb. Worldwide, TB kills more people than AIDS, malaria, and tropical diseases combined: 8,000 persons each day. Some 20 million people now suffer from active TB, and some 30 million could die from it in the next ten years—a number larger than the population of Canada.

The cure for TB was discovered more than four decades ago. Since then, over 120 million people have died of TB, and nearly 3 million more people will die this year. Why are so many people still dying from TB when there is a cure? For three main reasons: neglect, HIV/AIDS, and multidrug-resistant TB.

[Optional] Diabetes becoming worldwide epidemic

Yahoo!

Diabetes is spreading from rich countries like the U.S. and turning into a worldwide epidemic as much of the developing world turns to more sedentary lifestyles, *Reuters* reported. Diabetes cases are expected to climb 170 percent in developing nations over the next three decades, said scientists from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Scientists expect 22 million Americans will have diabetes by 2025, up from 16 million today. The disease, which is associated with obesity and

inactivity, is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States, killing nearly 200,000 people every year.

► Earthquakes and other natural disasters

vs. 7— And earthquakes in various places.

The Universal Almanac tells us:

There were only 21 earthquakes of major strength between the years 1000 and 1800.

There were 18 major earthquakes between 1800 and 1900.

There were 33 major quakes between 1900 and 1950—so there were almost as many in 50 years as the number in the preceding 850 years!

There were 93 major earthquakes between 1950 and 1991 (almost triple the number of the previous half century) which claimed the lives of 1.3 million people around the world.

The US Geological Survey National Earthquake Information Center reports that there are over 3.3 million earthquakes occurring annually throughout the world. Around 140 of them are magnitude 6.0 or greater on the Richter scale. There is no reliable predictor of when quakes will occur and they occur over widely scattered areas of the world.

There were a record number of disasters in 1999. About 70,000 people were killed in well over 700 disasters. Of these, about 20,000 people died in six serious earthquakes, with many thousands more left injured and homeless (Munich Re, Insurers, and other sources).

Because of declining soil fertility, drought, flooding or deforestation, some 25 million “environmental refugees” were driven from their homes in 1999. In the last six years, the number of people needing assistance from the Red Cross and Crescent alone due to floods and earthquakes has risen from less than half a million to more than 5½ million.

[Optional] Quakes kill more than 21,000 in 2001

Associated Press

Researchers say 2001 was a particularly deadly year for earthquakes, with 65 significant quakes worldwide blamed for killing more than 21,000 people. To be precise, the U.S. Geological Survey said 21,436 people died in earthquakes last year. The toll was significantly higher than in 2000, when 225 earthquake deaths were reported worldwide. On average, 10,000 people die in earthquakes annually, the USGS said.

Millions of minor earthquakes occur annually. Significant earthquakes are those of magnitude 6.5 or greater or those that cause fatalities, injuries or substantial damage. During a typical year, 18 major earthquakes (magnitude 7.0 to 7.9) and one great earthquake (8.0 or higher) occur worldwide, the USGS said.

[Optional] Quakes and floods bigger killers than terror in 2002

Reuters

Despite rising concern around the world about terrorism, the past year saw far more people killed by natural disasters than any man-made catastrophe.

Munich Re, the world’s biggest reinsurance company, said in an annual report on natural disasters that 11,000 people were killed by floods, earthquakes, storms and other extreme weather in 2002, and worse was likely to follow.

“Although in the case of man-made catastrophes the year 2002 was marked by numerous air crashes, shipping accidents, major fires, and further terrorist attacks, they were far from reaching the same extent of (economic) loss or number of victims as the natural catastrophes,” Munich Re said.

This year’s death toll was lower than the 25,000 in 2001, when an earthquake in the western Indian state of Gujarat killed at least 19,700 people, but economic losses from such disasters soared to \$55 billion, Munich Re said.

[Optional] Izmit's dogs howled

By Robert Fisk, *The Independent*

At around 3 o'clock in the morning of Monday, August 16, 1999, Kanieh Topal woke in her three-story apartment block in the western suburbs of Izmit to hear a strange sound. "All the dogs were howling," she said.

Nature, it seems, was trying to warn the people of Izmit and Yalova and Golcuk and Istanbul and a thousand other towns and villages across 450 miles of Turkey. Twelve miles beneath them, the great tectonic plates of the north Anatolian rock fault had begun to move.

Exactly 24 hours after the dogs had given the people of Izmit their warning, the 12-mile deep fissure cracked, snapping open the earth's crust and visiting desolation on the sleeping humans above. In the space of 45 to 90 seconds, well over 100,000 apartment blocks, hotels, hospitals, shops, factories and private houses thundered to the ground in what one survivor described as an "atomic" explosion. As the sun dawned a dark crimson through the dust that hung for miles above northwestern Turkey, it was clear that its people had suffered the equivalent of a small-scale nuclear holocaust. Thousands died, and tens of thousands were injured.

But it was the construction companies and bribery of the late Seventies and early Eighties that had doomed the people. Every time neighbors pulled at shards of concrete, the material broke off in their hands. Concrete is made from sand and cement. The less cement and the more sand you use, the cheaper. In effect, many of the doomed were living in houses made from sand.

We call them "acts of God," but it is usually human actions that turn natural phenomena into disasters. Eighty percent of earthquake deaths are caused by collapsing buildings. More than half of all buildings in Turkey, according to the local Architects' Chamber, are built in violation of construction rules. Often they are put up without planning permission, with inspectors turning a blind eye; and politicians frequently grant amnesties for illegal buildings as elections approach.

This is just one example of a global problem. Most of the 100,000 people who died in an earthquake in Armenia in 1988 were in cheap concrete buildings. It was much the same in the Peru earthquake of 1970, which killed 60,000. And even in Japan, most of the buildings that collapsed in the 1995 Kobe earthquake, in which 5,000 died, were poor constructions rushed up after the Second World War.

"During this century more than 1.5 million people have lost their lives as a result of earthquakes, and the vast majority of this toll is because of building design," said Ed Booth of the engineers Ove Arup and Partners, after the Kobe disaster.

Poverty is also to blame. The Red Cross points out that the poor can often afford only badly built housing. An earthquake in Guatemala City, which killed 23,000 in 1976, became known as the "class quake" because of the accuracy with which it hit the poor.

► Persecution of God's people

vs. 9—Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

"This century [the 20th] is known as 'The martyrs' century' because more people have lost their lives for their Christianity since 1900 than in all the previous centuries together," writes the mission agency Open Doors, founded in 1955 by a Dutchman known as Brother Andrew, whose 1967 book *God's Smuggler* has sold 14 million copies around the globe.

"Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world," writes Nina Shea, former advisor to the Committee of Religious Freedom, in her book *In the Lion's Den*. "During the twentieth century more of them died, as a result of persecutions, than in all the preceding nineteen hundreds since the birth of Christ. When I say persecution I don't mean simple discrimination, but slavery, torture and murder."

"All over the world there are about 200 million followers of Christ suffering today," says Michael Horowitz of the Hudson Institute, "and it's surprising that nobody, neither the Christian community nor the establishment, talks about it." The average number of Christian martyrs per year worldwide is 163,000 (International Bulletin of Missionary Research).

Nineteen European countries violate religious liberty, according to the 1998 report of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF). Subsequent annual reports describe an increase of intolerance and repression of minority religions.

[Optional] Examples around the world...

(Editors: These are example of state-sponsored discrimination of non-majority faiths.)

Central Asia and former Soviet countries. (*Forum 18 bulletin, July 2003*) An alarming number of states raid religious meetings to close down services and punish those who take part. Turkmenistan is the worst offender: it treats all non-Russian Orthodox and non-Muslim worship as illegal. Uzbekistan and Belarus specifically ban unregistered religious services. In Belarus, numerous Protestant congregations—some numbering more than a thousand members—cannot meet because they cannot get a registered place to worship. Officials in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan also raid places where worship is being conducted.

Turkmenistan has dismissed from state jobs hundreds of active Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious minorities. Armenia has ordered local police chiefs to persuade police who were members of faiths other than the Armenian Apostolic Church to abandon their faith. If persuasion failed, such employees were to be sacked. Belarus has subjected leaders of independent Orthodox Churches and Hindus to pressure—including fines, threats and inducements—to abandon their faith or emigrate. Officials in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus repeatedly attack disfavoured religious minorities in the media, insulting their beliefs, accusing them falsely of illegal or "destructive" activities, as well as inciting popular hostility to them. Turkmen and Azeri officials try to persuade people to abandon their faith and "return" to their ancestral faith (Islam).

France and Belgium. (*IHF, News Release July 2003*) Since the mid-1990s, the Belgian and French governments have been engaged in efforts to monitor and warn the public of religious groups depicted as "harmful sects." These policies have primarily targeted religious groups that have never been engaged in anything but peaceful and lawful activities, and have encouraged prejudice and intolerance toward them. The governments in the two countries have not taken any effective measures to counteract the hostility and discrimination suffered by members of religious groups depicted as "sects." The "anti-sect" policies pursued by the Belgian and French governments have also set a problematic precedent for former socialist countries that have sought to present restrictive policies toward "new" religious movements as democratically acceptable.

Malaysia. (*AP, April 2003*) Malaysian church leaders and lawyers have urged the government to lift a ban on a Bible in the Iban language. The Bible is widely used by churches in Malaysia's Sarawak state on Borneo island, where the Iban people are one of the largest indigenous groups. The Home Ministry announced that this Bible was among 35 books banned effective immediately because they were considered detrimental to public peace.

Egypt. (*Barnabas Fund, June 2003*) Naglaa, a Christian convert from Islam, and her husband Malak have been held in prison since mid-February in an effort to force Naglaa to give up her Christian faith and return to Islam, to leave her husband, and to raise her children as Muslims. Naglaa and her husband Malak Gawargios Fahmy were arrested at the airport as they tried to leave Egypt for Cyprus. Under Egyptian law, and it is prohibited for Christian men to marry Muslim women.)

Laos and Vietnam. (*Christian Solidarity Worldwide [CSW], July 2003*) Persecuted Christians have been driven off their lands and face destitution. 21 Bru Christians were imprisoned in Savannakhet, Laos. One man is serving a sentence of 15 years in Udomsay Province for his religious activities. In Vietnam, unregistered Christians face threats, persecution, and eviction from their land, as well as destruction of church buildings, beatings, forced conversions and demands for renunciation of their faith.

Eritrea. (*CSW, 2003*) Persecution of independent Protestant churches continues. At Easter, two Evangelical Lutheran Church members were arrested and detained for three days. In Sahel, military police forcibly conscripted sixteen female and forty male Pentecostal Christians, although all had completed their mandatory military service.

Bhutan. (*CSW, 2001*) The government of Bhutan has stepped up its persecution of Christians. Bhutanese authorities and police moved in to churches on Palm Sunday to register the names of believers. Many pastors were detained, interrogated, and threatened with imprisonment. The authorities want Christians to stop witnessing and have closed many churches. Forms have been circulated requiring Christians to comply with "rules and regulations governing the practice of religion."

China. (CSW, 2001) Important official documents revealing centralized coordinated plans to crack down on and eliminate specific religious groups have been disclosed. One of the documents issued by the Ministry of Public Security, entitled "Notice on Various Issues Regarding Identifying and Banning of Cultic Organizations" lists 14 groups identified as cults. Some of the doctrines condemned as heresies in the document are beliefs widely held by Christians around the world, such as praying for healing. The Shouters and the All Sphere Church (founded by Xu Yongze) are listed as cults, with reference also made to the South China Church. The head of the South China Church, Gong Sheng Liang has been sentenced to death, along with four other leaders of the group.

Russia. (CSW, 2001) Russian proposals for a new state policy on religion would give broad social access solely to those confessions deemed "traditional" there. An earlier state policy on national security adopted shortly after Vladimir Putin became acting president last January refers to the need to "counter the negative impact of foreign missionaries," who, some state officials believe, are western agents bent on destabilizing the nation and seizing control of Russia's Far East. When the Moscow municipal authorities recently refused to renew the legal status of the Salvation Army in the capital, a local court cited the church's subordination to a foreign center of authority among the grounds for the decision.

[Optional] Europe spars over faith

Compiled from articles in *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Religion Today*

While violence has flared between and against faiths in several regions of the world, quieter forms of persecution have emerged in Europe. On a continent that helped nourish the concept of universal human rights, religious freedom is taking some serious blows.

And these blows are falling not just in Eastern Europe, where countries may still be struggling with the aftermath of atheistic pasts, but also in the heart of Western Europe, where a few governments have taken it upon themselves to call a whole host of minority religions "dangerous sects."

Rijk Van Dam, a Dutch member of the European Parliament, told a human-rights conference sponsored by the Rutherford Institute that many countries agree to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but practice "brutal deeds" against religious believers. "Persecution because of religious belief, torture and torment, and unfair and dishonest trials are the order of the day."

Europe is so secularized that it treats active minority religious groups as threats, Pedro Moreno, Rutherford's international director, told *Religion Today*.

France and Belgium have set up commissions to look into sects and published reports with lists of more than 170 "harmful" groups without consulting with the groups or with scholars in the field. "This resulted," says the IHF, "in media reports libeling minority religions, circulation of rumors and false information, and incitement of religious intolerance."

[Optional] Family members

Members of the Christian movement The Family have experienced persecution. Provoked to action because of malicious allegations by detractors, in the early '90s the authorities raided communities affiliated with The Family in Argentina, Australia, France and Spain. The pre-dawn raids by armed police, who in some cases also sent helicopters, were frightening for children and adults alike. The children were seized and taken into state care while some of the adults were arrested. Subsequent investigations indicated that the authorities had been misled and the raids were uncalled for. Examinations of the children showed that allegations of abuse were false and that the children were in good health. They were all returned to their parents. The adults who had been arrested were soon released without any charges.

According to the testimony of Dr. T. Jeremy Gunn before the House International Relations Committee at the U.S. House of Representatives on June 14, 2000, the mistreatment of The Family members by French authorities was not unlike that of the French Vichy government's persecution of the Jews during the World War 2 Nazi terror. He said, "Nevertheless, there are some frightening broader similarities to Vichy in some extreme cases, such as the 1993 raid on The Family community in Aix-en-Provence. In that case, 200 heavily armed police arrived during the night and dragged members of the group into custody, alleging that they had committed child abuse. In February of this year, the court in Aix-en-Provence finally dropped all charges against the group and closed down the investigation."

► Love of many growing cold

vs. 12—And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

2 Timothy 3:1–4—But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: (2) For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, (3) unloving ... (4) lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

The breakdown of family life and a horrific increase in domestic violence are all sad indicators of the fulfillment of these verses.

According to European Union statistics, 11% of European citizens live alone, compared with 8% twenty years ago. In England, almost one out of every four children lives in a household with just one parent. Europe-wide, 13% of children live with just one parent, which is not that surprising considering that a third of all European marriages are likely to end in divorce. In America, the Census Bureau projects that 4 of 10 first marriages will end in divorce. 70% of children will spend some time of their childhood in a single parent family.

Domestic violence is another tragedy. In the USA, estimates range from 960,000 incidents of violence against a current or former spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend per year to 4 million women who are physically abused by their husbands or live-in partners per year. In 1996, among all female murder victims in the U.S., 30% were slain by their husbands or boyfriends. Forty percent of teenage girls age 14 to 17 report knowing someone their age who has been hit or beaten by a boyfriend (FBI and other sources).

In Europe things are little better. Recent studies (October 2000) in the United Kingdom revealed that police receive more than 1,300 calls every day, or more than 570,000 calls a year, relating to domestic violence. The figures suggest that an individual is violently assaulted in their home every six to 20 seconds. An average of two women are killed by their partners or ex-partners in England and Wales each week.

A mother's love for her infant has always been considered as pure and natural as can be, yet the lack of love and care on the part of those around a pregnant woman may cause her to feel that her only option is to abort the child. Reuters reports that "women around the world are having fewer children and are ending more than a quarter of all pregnancies in abortion." Considering the stresses and material difficulties caused by the lack of a loving, supportive partner, we can sympathize that there are difficult decisions to be made because of an unplanned pregnancy, however abortion is not an acceptable option in God's eyes. It is deplorable that despite the fact that fetal science has made it evident that human life begins at conception, worldwide over 46 million unborn children's lives are snuffed out every year.

Jeremiah 2:34—Also on your skirts is found the blood of the lives of the poor innocents. I [God] have not found it by secret search, but plainly on all these things.

[Optional] Britain singled out as lonely nation

There are 1.6 million lone parents in Britain. A steady decline in marriages coupled with rising divorce rates has revealed that Britain may be turning into a nation of loners.

The independent Family Policy Studies Centre (FPSC) findings show that more than 6.5 million people in Britain—about 28% of households—now live on their own, three times as many as 40 years ago.

[Optional] Love gone cold: Kofi Annan's astonishing facts

New York Times News Service

Every year the United Nations Human Development Report looks for a new way to measure the lives of people. Putting aside faceless statistics like per capita gross domestic product, the report burrows into the facts about what children eat, who goes to school, whether there is clean water to drink, and so on. In 1998, the report takes its first look at what people have—from simple toilets to family cars—and what proportion of the world's goods and services are consumed, comparatively, by the rich and the poor. The pie is huge—the world's consumption bill is \$24 trillion a year—but some servings are very small indeed.

The haves. The richest fifth of the world's people consumes 86% of all goods and services while the poorest fifth consumes just 1.3%. Indeed, the richest fifth consumes 45% of all meat and fish, 58% of all energy used and 84% of all paper, has 74% of all telephone lines and owns 87% of all vehicles.

Natural resources. Since 1970, the world's forests have declined from 4.4 square miles per 1,000 people to 2.8 square miles per 1,000 people. In addition, a quarter of the world's fish stocks have been depleted or are in danger of being depleted and another 44% are being fished at their biological limit.

The ultra rich. The three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the 48 least developed countries.

Africa. The average African household today consumes 20% less than it did 25 years ago.

The super rich. The world's 225 richest individuals, of whom 60 are Americans, have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion—equal to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the entire world's population.

Cosmetics and education. Americans spend \$8 billion a year on cosmetics—\$2 billion more than the estimated total needed to provide basic education for everyone in the world.

The have-nots. Of the 4.4 billion people in developing countries, nearly three-fifths lack access to safe sewers, a third have no access to clean water, a quarter do not have adequate housing, and a fifth have no access to modern health services of any kind.

Meat. Americans each consume an average of 260 pounds of meat a year. In Bangladesh, the average is six-and-a-half pounds.

Telephone lines. Sweden and the U.S. have 681 and 626 telephone lines per 1,000 people, respectively. Afghanistan, Cambodia, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have one line per 1,000 people.

Ice cream and water. Europeans spend \$11 billion a year on ice cream—\$2 billion more than the estimated annual total needed to provide clean water and safe sewers for the world's population.

Land mines. More than 110 million active land mines are scattered in 68 countries, with an equal number stockpiled around the world. Every month more than 2,000 people are killed or maimed by mine explosions.

Pet food and health. Americans and Europeans spend \$17 billion a year on pet food—\$4 billion more than the estimated annual additional total needed to provide basic health and nutrition for everyone in the world.

\$40 billion a year. It is estimated that the additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all and clean water and safe sewers for all is roughly \$40 billion a year—or less than 4% of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world.

► Gospel preached in all the world

vs. 14—And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Unlike the rise in wars, famine, plagues, earthquakes, etc., Jesus said that this particular sign was not merely something to indicate “the beginning of sorrows,” but was a specific sign that would indicate when the actual End—Christ's Second Coming—would be upon the world.

Christians and Christian churches now exist in every country of the world. The Gospel has been preached to over 4 billion people in these countries. Over 50 million Bibles are distributed every year, as well as nearly 80 million New Testaments. Four billion Gospel tracts are also printed each year.

The entire Bible or parts thereof are now available to about 98 percent of the world's population, having been translated partially or entirely into some 2,203 different languages.

Other Christian books are also proliferating, with some 3 billion being printed every year by 1,500 presses and publishers. The Gospel is also preached from 2,160 Christian radio and television stations, and religious shows are carried on many more thousands of secular stations.

Plus there is a proliferation of religious Web sites on the Internet.

So this is one of the signs of the End that has already occurred! The Gospel has already been preached in all nations all over the world. If not directly by missionaries, certainly by radio and television, the Internet, literature, or travelers and visitors and so on. Every nation on the face of the Earth has today heard the Gospel. Perhaps not every tribe and tongue and dialect and little tiny group, but every single nation on the face of the Earth has now had the opportunity to hear the Gospel.

[Optional] The Word gets out!

Bible boom. (*Religion Today*) Bible Societies around the world distributed 20 million Bibles in 1997. The Scriptures were produced in hundreds of languages and distributed in almost every country. The total distributed, including New Testaments and gospel booklets, was 561,633,376, the Bible Society of New Zealand said.

(*Christian Daily News*) In 1999, 24 million complete Bibles (Old and New Testament) were distributed. The Bible or portions of the holy Scriptures are available in 2,233 languages.

New translations. (*Religion Today*) Portions of the Bible have been translated into more than 2,000 of the world's languages, according to the United Bible Societies. In the past year, the entire Bible was translated into eight new languages and the New Testament into 30 new languages. Some 62 other ethnic groups had at least one chapter of the Bible translated into their language for the first time, the UBS said.

The Jesus Film: Forget Titanic. Forget Star Wars and Gone With the Wind. They are small fry compared to the Jesus Film, which has been watched by more than two billion people. More than 40 million people in 120 countries have prayed to become Christians after viewing the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, according to Campus Crusade. The movie has been translated into more than 760 languages and dialects.

Asia. (*Religion Today*) The number of Christians in Asia has doubled in the last 20 years, church analyst Saphir Athyal said. More than 145 million Asians now celebrate Christmas, according to AsiaWeek magazine.

Growth has been dramatic in countries where Christianity encounters opposition. "Persecution [has] resulted in purification of the church and the strengthening of its witness," Athyal said. Three centuries of missionary work in China had produced only a few million Christians before the Communists ordered foreign workers to leave in 1950. After decades of persecution, today there may be as many as 75 million believers, including many in the underground house-church movement. In Vietnam, cell churches are expanding in cities, and rural tribes are turning to Christianity through the work of evangelists and gospel radio programs.

[Optional] Topping one billion!

To date over its 34-year history (as of May 2003), members of The Family have led over 27 million people to receive Jesus and distributed over one billion pieces of Gospel literature.

► Verses 15–21: The Antichrist One-World Government and the Great Tribulation

All of the sobering signs—the increase in disasters, in famines, in wars—were the “beginning of sorrows.” The fact that the Gospel has been preached brings us to the next phase: The very last days. Now Jesus is going to be even more specific about the exact end of things:

Matthew 24:15–21—Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. (18) And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. (19) But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! (20) And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. (21) For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

► The Antichrist, his government, his image, and his mark

vs. 15—When you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place...

Jesus is referring to the prophecies in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 11:31—And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.

There are many references in Revelation and other places in the Bible that also expand on this. We don't have time to go into a detailed study now, but we'll summarize. We learn from the Bible that when the Antichrist claims control of the world, he sets up some kind of an Image or an idol, "the Abomination of Desolation" which the people of the world are ordered to worship—signifying their worship of him.

Revelation Chapter 13 puts this in terms that we can understand quite easily, so let's look at the key verses.

Revelation 13:14–15—And [the Antichrist's false prophet] deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. (15) He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

The "beast" is the Antichrist. But the Image of the Beast is something else. How could an image speak? If we think of an old marble idol, it's hard to picture it; but if we think of a computer that sends out instructions, whether the instructions are literally verbal or written, then it's easier to imagine. We don't know what the Image will be, but it is now technologically possible for it to be "speaking."

Revelation 13:16–18—[The false prophet] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, (17) and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. (18) Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

Here's the famous "Mark of the Beast" or "666." It sounds like some kind of financial control, because without the mark, nobody is allowed to buy or sell.

Until this point in history, no government could have had such total control, but now the technology is available in ways that are unprecedented! Society is even being prepared and convinced that such a government would be the solution to the world's pressing problems—a New World Order.

The mechanisms of the Antichrist's New World Order are being put in place little by little. Technology has broken down borders and national sovereignty has become less important. These conditions will make the creation of a one-world government relatively simple. It's happening so gradually that global government will be a logical next step. The poor of the world will certainly embrace it. At the moment, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and those who are poverty-stricken won't think it can get any worse.

The mark will probably be touted as a great financial convenience, but there is more to it than that. In the Bible receiving the mark and worshipping the Beast are usually mentioned together. Though it doesn't specifically say how they relate, the implication is that receiving the mark is part of accepting the Antichrist's rule and something God's children should therefore not do.

Revelation 14:9–10—If anyone worships the Beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God.

[Optional] World government

(CBN) With nation linked to nation through the economics of trade and the financial markets, and certain regions of the world almost perpetually on the brink of war, some believe there's a real need for world government.

Author Gary Kah has researched groups which support global government. "I believe that we are quite possibly one major world crisis away from world government becoming a reality," says Kah. "I'm talking about either an economic crisis or a military crisis, or possibly a combination of both."

In the *San Francisco Weekly*, Jim Garrison Jr., the head of the Gorbachev Foundation USA, said the planet needs a "Council of Elders" drawn from the highest echelons of politics, science, the arts, and commerce. Garrison predicts that "over the next 20 to 30 years, we are going to end up with world government—it's inevitable."

[Optional] One Global Authority

Former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott believes the United States may not exist in its current form in the 21st Century—because nationhood throughout the world will become obsolete. Talbott defined, shaped and executed the Clinton administration's foreign policy.

Just before joining the administration, Talbott wrote in *Time* magazine—in an essay titled "The Birth of the Global Nation"—that he is looking forward to government run by "one global authority." "Here is one optimist's reason for believing unity will prevail. Within the next hundred years ... nationhood as we know it will be obsolete; all states will recognize a single, global authority," Talbott declared in the July 20, 1992 issue of *Time*.

[Optional] The Invisible World Order

(*Atlantic Unbound*)

On July 17th 1999, 120 member states of the United Nations agreed to create a permanent global war-crimes tribunal, to be called the International Criminal Court. The ICC and other projects like it are signs that the world is getting serious about thinking of itself as a world. As we envision more and more of these global institutions we are simultaneously confronted with the prospect of more and more databases of increasing size and complexity. The time has come to take a step back and ask the question: Are we ready to live in such a place?

[Optional] Wiring the West

(Steve Harris, *The Age Melbourne*)

In a six-day live chatroom, 40 heads of state, 250 political leaders, 300 scientists, artists, academics and intellectuals, and 1,000 corporate chiefs (each with \$1 billion in revenue) talked over what in the world is going on, and where the world might be going. The annual World Economic Forum is committed to improving the state of the world. It seeks to bring leaders from various fields together to discuss key issues, away from the usual obstacles of bureaucracies, protocols, and media scrutiny.

Whichever word in whichever language, the world's elite has either fully embraced globalization, or fully accepted it as unstoppable: ready or not, the world is being plugged into one hot-wired, digitized, interactive marketplace, with normal definitions and understanding of time, distance, corporations, assets, value, consumers and government being challenged or transformed with astonishing speed.

[Optional] Globaphobia?

(Tony Parkinson, *The Age Melbourne*)

Technology is shrinking the planet. Satellite communications have seen the cost of a three-minute transatlantic phone call fall from \$244.65 in 1930 to less than \$4 today. The cost of computing power has fallen by 99 per cent since the '60s. In 1980, IBM predicted the world market for personal computers over the next 10 years would be 275,000 machines. By 1990, there were more than 60 million PC users. World trade has also expanded exponentially as nations open their markets. A study by Michele Roth, of the Global Policy Forum, found that 160 of the top 200 most influential institutions on the planet today are transnational corporations.

They have overtaken all but the wealthiest nation states. As the 1997 Asian financial meltdown demonstrated, governments can be powerless before the tidal wash of international capital. The Bank for International Settlements reported a flow of more than \$100 billion into Asia in one year, and \$100 billion outflow the next.

Canada's Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, voiced the growing sense of vulnerability among the political class. "Capitalism hasn't come up with all the answers. We cannot see prosperity disappear overnight because some boy in red suspenders in New York decides this is not a good currency."

General Motors has corporate sales bigger than the revenue of the Danish government. Toyota has a turnover greater than Norway's. The 10 biggest industrial multinationals (Mitsubishi, General Motors, Mitsui, Itochu, Ford, Sumitomo, Toyota, Exxon, Marubeni and Shell) each has revenue bases bigger than the tax take of the Australian government.

Only the governments of the U.S., Japan, Germany, France, Britain and Italy carry more financial clout than the biggest multinationals. But even they may not be able to stare down the cumulative might of global financial markets. In 1992, speculator George Soros "broke" the Bank of England and forced a devaluation of the pound sterling.

The postwar era has produced the most remarkable rise in living standards in history. Yet the number of the truly destitute exceeds 1.3 billion. For one-fifth of the world's population, mainly in Africa, living standards fell during the '80s. More than 1.5 billion people lack safe drinking water and more than a billion are illiterate.

[Optional] The charter for global democracy

(Henry Lamb, *WorldNetDaily*)

In less than a year [September 2000], the United Nations will convene a special Millennium Assembly as a global summit on the future of the world. A Charter to achieve global governance was developed for presentation at the Millennium Assembly. It is called The Charter for Global Democracy. It has already been signed by influential leaders in 56 nations, and has the support of NGOs [non-governmental organizations] around the world. The document is, in reality, a Charter for the abolition of individual freedom.

The first of 12 principles calls for the consolidation of all international agencies under the direct authority of the United Nations. The second principle calls for regulation by the UN of all transnational corporations and financial institutions, requiring an "international code of conduct" concerning the environment and labor standards.

Dozens of documents, all promoting some form of world government, have been circulating for most of this decade. All contain these same principles. The Millennium Assembly will receive these documents and meld them into the legal instruments required to modify the existing UN Charter. It will take a year or two for the legal documents to be prepared and adopted, and another year or two for ratification. The world is truly standing at the threshold of world government.

(Editors: The Summit was convened as planned in September 2000, attended by more than 150 heads of state.)

[Optional] Controls and limits on personal freedom—already happening!

(*Wired*)

The European Union is quietly getting ready to approve legislation that will allow the police to eavesdrop both on Internet conversations and satellite telephone calls without obtaining court authorization.

The legislation is part of a much wider memorandum of understanding between the E.U., the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Norway, a non-member European nation. That agreement allows authorities to conduct telecom surveillance across international borders, according to a Europol document leaked to members of the European Parliament.

If approved, the agreement would permit real-time, remote monitoring of e-mail, as well as of calls placed on satellite telephone networks. Unlike most laws in Europe, the agreement will allow law enforcement to listen in without a court order.

(Joseph Farah, *WorldNetDaily*)

* Your e-mail communications and phone calls overseas are being intercepted by a global government surveillance system.

* Your cellular phone calls to your elected government officials are being monitored by the same mysterious Echelon program controlled by the U.S. National Security Agency.

* Your international faxes are also being copied and analyzed by this 50-year-old international civilian espionage organization.

(Sunday Times)

Privacy outside the home is almost extinct. The number of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in Britain's public places has now passed 1 million, according to industry figures.

So dense is the network that in many urban areas people may be monitored from the moment they step out of their front door and be kept under observation on their way to work, in the office and even in a restaurant if they choose to dine out. Over the course of a day they could be filmed by 300 cameras.

(Simon Davies, Los Angeles Times)

Fifty years ago, a bizarre and terrifying novel went on sale in bookshops across the world. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* caught the imagination of millions, and in the process catapulted Big Brother into the international vocabulary. The phrase soon became shorthand for the power of the state, and it helped entire generations to express their fear of intrusion by authority.

To the digital generation, the all-seeing, all-knowing Big Brother is represented by large computer systems. Each adult in the developed world is located, on average, in 300 databases. As these databases converge with the telecommunications spectrum, nearly everyone becomes entangled in a web of surveillance enveloping everything from our bank accounts to our e-mail. To millions of people, Big Brother looms as a chilling warning about the creation of a surveillance society through information technology.

Superficially, Orwell got it wrong—1984 came and went with many of our freedoms apparently still intact. But a closer reading of the book reveals that we are nearer to Big Brother than we might imagine.

In Orwell's fictional Oceania, a mass of "telescreens," complete with microphones and speakers, watched over every square inch of public and private space. These devices, centrally monitored, began their life as public information systems and ended up policing the morals, thoughts and behavior of all citizens.

Compare this with the present day, where hundreds of thousands of cameras have been placed on buses, trains and elevators. Many people now expect to be routinely filmed from the moment they leave the front gate. Hidden cameras are being installed unhindered in cinemas, alongside roads, in bars, dressing rooms and housing estates. In the United States and Britain, visual surveillance is becoming a fixed component in the design of urban centers, housing areas, public buildings and even throughout the road system.

[Optional] The Mark of the Beast—financial control, and more!

(The Straits Times)

SINGAPORE—Take out your wallet and count the number of cards you carry, not to mention all the Personal Identification Numbers (PINs) that you have to memorize for every possible transaction. Then there is your passport, driver's license, insurance documents, not to mention details like home and work addresses, phone and fax numbers.

All that information, says BT Laboratories' Peter Cochrane, can be put into a single silicon chip on a smart card. Everything from employment and medical records to financial status can be written into the chip. Add a short-range wireless transmitter-receiver, implant the whole thing under your skin, and you have a personal transponder, just like those in airplanes.

A chip like that can give you total freedom, according to Professor Cochrane. You walk into an airport and clear Customs and Immigrations in minutes because all your personal information will be processed by computers instead of humans. Since all your financial information is also in the chip, you can simply walk up to an ATM machine in any country and withdraw money as and when you need it.

Even grocery-shopping could be easier. Just walk into a store and pick up whatever you want to buy. No more queues at the cashier's counter.

All this could be reality in 10 years time.

[Optional] The future of money

(Time)

Cash is headed for a whole new dimension. MasterCard has invested millions in the development of an E-cash system called Mondex. Smart Mondex cards have tiny embedded microchips that can store not only electronic dollars but also five other types of currency, an abbreviated medical history and even a personalized electronic “key” that can open everything from your apartment to your office. Says Henry Mundt, MasterCard executive vice president for global access: “The chip that we are putting on the card now will form the platform for the ultimate in remote access for consumers to their funds, anytime, anywhere. What we really see happening in the future is consumers being able to design their cards to meet their individual needs. We refer to that as moving more toward life-style cards.” E-cash is already everywhere, from highway tolls to subways.

Technology and finance have become one and the same. As William Niskanen, chairman of the Washington-based CATO Institute, puts it, “The distinction between software and money is disappearing.” And nowhere is that truer than in the world of cold, hard cash.

Paper money is, in its way, amazing stuff. It is, for instance, easily transferable and widely accepted. You can pay the baby sitter without even thinking about the complex financial dynamics underlying the transaction. Cash—especially U.S. dollars—is also portable, storable and exchangeable. (Just ask the thousands of Russian Mafiosi who pay for nearly everything with \$100 bills.) But paper cash does have some awful drawbacks. Lose it and it’s gone; sit on it and it may lose its value overnight: think about what just happened in Asia, or earlier in South America.

Enter electronic cash. The idea of digital money is simple enough: instead of storing value on paper, find a way to wrap it in a string of digits that’s more portable and (most important) smarter than its paper counterpart. Smart money? Well, yes. Because digital cash is endlessly mutable, you can control it much more precisely than paper money. Think about the \$2,000 check you send to your daughter at college for expenses. How is that money really spent? Books ... or beer? Electronic cash takes that relatively simple transaction—passing an allowance—and makes it into a much more intelligent process. And one that hardly requires something as old-fashioned as a bank.

For starters, you can send the money over the Internet encoded in an E-mail instead of sending a check. Your daughter can store the money any way she wants—on her laptop, on a debit card, even (in the not too distant future) on a chip implanted under her skin. And, you can program the money to be spent only in specific ways. You might instruct some of the digits to go for books, some for food and some for movies. Unless you pass along a few digits that can be cashed at the local pub, she’ll have to find someone else to buy the drinks.

Smart, digital cash may also address some of the other problems of paper money. If you lose your digital cash, for example, you will be able to replace it instantly by asking your computer to invalidate the disappeared digits and replace them with a fresh set. And unlike paper money—which stops earning interest as it shoots out of the ATM slot—smart money can keep earning interest until the moment you spend it.

[Optional] Chips get smaller and smarter

By Eric C. Everts, *The Christian Science Monitor*

First, they appeared in computers. Then they went into clocks, calculators, and coffeemakers. Now they are popping up in credit cards, car windshields, running shoes—and even pets.

Ultimately, say technology experts, they will be embedded in people to track their health, résumés, and whereabouts.

“They” are silicon chips. And as these tiny objects get smaller and smarter, they are bringing about more changes in the way we live. For example:

Britain recently passed a law granting special privileges to foreign pets implanted with silicon ID chips. If the chip indicates a pet’s vaccines are up to date, the animal can come into the country without the usual six-month quarantine.

Running shoes equipped with computer chips can adjust the shoes’ cushioning based on whether the wearer is running or walking.

Last September, American Express introduced the Blue Card—a credit card with an electronic chip that acts as a checking account for Internet purchases. The chip stores financial data and works much like the magnetic strips on the back of other credit cards. But it holds much more data, lasts longer, and is more secure from thieves.

Travelers on Virginia toll roads can have tolls debited from their bank accounts via chips embedded in windshield stickers.

Ultimately chips could migrate under our skin, though the ethical and humanitarian implications remain unclear. In 1996, Professor Kevin Warwick at the University of Reading in Britain had a chip put in his arm that could unlock doors, turn on lights, and boot up his computer.

All the technology needed for chips to interact directly with humans is already available, says Gene France, a senior fellow at Texas Instruments in Dallas. "All we have to do is figure out how to get them not to be so clunky."

"If I could just download [commands] from my brain, that would be kind of exciting," says Mr. France. "I've always maintained that someday [knowing] calculus will be a matter of sticking your hand on an electrode pad ... For cellphones, I'd like to be able to just stick this little [chip] in my ear."

Another obstacle is power. Today's batteries are too big, heavy, expensive, and don't last long enough to run embedded chips. "My goal," says France, "is to reduce power requirements so the chips can run off body heat. Everybody I talk to says ... it'll never happen," he adds. "So I figure it'll be 30 or 40 years."

► The Great Tribulation

vs. 21—For then there will be great tribulation...

When the Antichrist has set up his Image, Jesus Himself said then begins the Great Tribulation! We know from other Scriptures that the Antichrist will rule for seven years (Daniel 9:27), and he sets up his Image halfway through. The Great Tribulation begins halfway through his reign. Not all seven years of his reign is tribulation, the first half is perhaps going to be fairly good, restoration of peace and the economy, a worldwide government at last, and perhaps less wars, especially at the beginning.

The "Great Tribulation" is a time of persecution of Christians and other devout religious believers. It's going to be dangerous for those who love God and stand up for Him and refuse to accept the Mark of the Beast. The New World Order's forces will be trying to kill those who refuse to worship the Antichrist.

Contrary to what some prophecy teachers have taught, the Christians of the world are still going to be here during the Tribulation. They're going to have to go through it. But the Lord assures us:

Matthew 24:22—And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

The Lord doesn't let it last too long, so it won't be too hard on you and me. Otherwise, "no flesh would be saved." During this time, the Lord's children will be miraculously protected and provided for, and it will also be a time of great witnessing and reaping.

We'll learn more about this in a future course.

[Optional] The Tribulation

We know from the Scriptures that the reign of the Antichrist is seven years: Daniel 9:27

We also know from a variety of other verses that the Tribulation period is 3½ years:

Daniel 7:25—He [the Antichrist] shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time* and times and half a time. (*"Time" meaning one year.)

Revelation 13:5—And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.

See also Revelation 12:6 and Daniel 12:7b.

► Watch out!

Matthew 24:23–25—Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. (24) For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (25) See, I have told you beforehand.

Jesus says to watch out during this time! He’s talking about the Tribulation period, especially. “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there”—why? Why would people start looking for Christ then? They’re going to start looking for Jesus because they know that He’s coming soon!

Jesus says that when they say “I’m here,” “Jesus has come here,” or “He’s over there,” don’t believe it! You know why? You’re going to know it when Jesus comes! You’re going to know it! “For,” He says, “false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” Even the Antichrist and False Prophet are going to do great signs and wonders, so that their followers will believe a lie and be damned.

Matthew 24:26–28—Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. (27) For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (28) For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

Jesus warns not to expect Him sooner than has been predicted, and that there will be many false Christs and false prophets who will try to deceive people into thinking either that they are Christ or that Christ is coming nearby somewhere, He is here or there. And He finally says, “Don’t believe any of them, because when I come you’ll know it!” The sky will light up like lightning from one end to the other, and there will be such a sign in the Heaven that you couldn’t possibly mistake the fact that Jesus is coming!

He will gather you together to His Body, and we will meet Him in the air! This is spoken of a number of times in God’s Word. It is spoken of in the first chapter of Acts, and in 1st Thessalonians chapter 4, etc. (This event is commonly known as the “Rapture.”)

What does this mean about a carcass and eagles? The coming of Christ will be as obvious as the gathering of eagles or vultures around a carcass.

The best way you’re going to know when Jesus comes is you’re going to be there! You’re going to rise to meet Him in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord!

► Jesus returns!

Matthew 24:29–31—Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Some theologians have taught that Christians will be “raptured” (resurrected) before the time of Great Tribulation. However it is clear from these verses that the Rapture occurs “after the tribulation of those days.”

That’s when Jesus is going to come: after the Tribulation! It says after the Tribulation shall appear the sign of the Son of man in Heaven. After the Tribulation, then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. After the Tribulation they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory. After the Tribulation He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather together His elect. That’s when Jesus is going to come back for His elect, to rapture His Saints, to gather them together!

How are you going to know when Jesus comes?—He’s going to come like lightning, shining even from the east unto the west! You’ll know when He comes because He’ll shine like lightning around the world and you’ll rise to meet Him in the air!

► Keep watching the signs!

Matthew 24:32–44—Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. (33) So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near— at the doors! (34) Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. (35) Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (36) But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of Heaven, but My Father only. (37) But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (38) For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, (39) and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (40) Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. (41) Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. (42) Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (43) But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. (44) Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

We've been talking about the signs. We know things are happening. Just like the leaves on the tree, we know summer is near!

Which generation will not pass? It wasn't the generation of the disciples who Jesus was talking about, but the generation who sees the signs. That's us!

God's Word is true and is going to happen. Just as we've been studying about so many prophecies that have already been fulfilled, all these other things that the Lord has said shall also happen!

The next part of this passage talks about the days of Noah. They were days of wickedness and violence on the earth. That's something else we can see around us.

Then the Lord talks about those He takes with Him in the Rapture. It doesn't matter where you are, or what you're doing at the time. If you're one of the saved, Jesus is going to take you to Heaven!

Jesus is not going to forget you! He's not going to leave you behind when He comes, no matter where you are or what you're doing. If you're asleep in bed, He's going to wake you up and take you. "Two shall be working out in the field," and some will be taken and some will be left behind.

But nobody who has received Jesus is going to be left behind! No one who trusts Christ for his salvation is going to be left behind. When Jesus comes at the end of that Great Tribulation He's going to take all of us who love the Lord, all of us who are saved, to be with Him forever!

Jesus is going to come then in the clouds with lightning and thunder and earthquake and stars falling and moon darkened and sun blacked out! The whole world's going to know something very unusual and very apocalyptic is happening! His coming won't be a secret, hidden event by any means!

And it's going to be the Apocalypse for sure!—The revelation of Jesus Christ Himself—coming in the heavens, in the clouds, in great power and glory, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, and Christ Himself will shout and call us from every part of the Earth and we'll be gathered together to be with Him! "And so," He tells us, "shall we ever be with the Lord!"

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17—For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

► Quick quiz: What are the signs of the times that Jesus told us to watch out for?

① Ask the students and see who can name them. The answers should include:

Deceivers; falling away from faith; wars and rumors of wars; civil wars (nation against nation); famines; pestilences; earthquakes and other natural disasters; persecution of God's people; love of

many growing cold; Gospel preached in all the world; one-world government; false christs and false prophets.

Class Section 2: What's Ahead, In a Nutshell!

15 minutes

① *It is important that the students get a basic overview of what's ahead—the bigger picture of what happens after Jesus returns. Depending on the materials you have available and the amount of time you have left, you can choose to teach these by either of two activities.*

① *Be careful in teaching this section not to be too rigid or dogmatic. We are simply presenting our understanding of the future as described in the Bible.*

► [Option 1] Show parts of the video *The Final Stand*

► [Option 2] Chronology of the future

① *The following should be read over briefly. You can use the "Chronology of the Future" Poster (Teacher's Aid) to go through the highlights.*

① *We have not included full verses here, only references. It is not expected that you would have enough time to look up and read the verses but they are here for your information.*

① *The references are also listed in the Study Notes book, page 1, "Chronology of the Future" so you can ask them to read the verses for homework.*

We've learned in this class what will happen before Jesus returns. Now we'll take a little time to quickly look at what will happen after His return. This is a very brief overview, but for the moment this is all we have time for.

■ You can read more about this in the *Discovering Truth—Bible Basics* book, pages 259–268, chapter on "The Endtime." We'll also learn more about it in later classes.

► Jesus Returns!

■ Jesus returns in the clouds
(Matthew 24:27–30; 1 Thessalonians 4:16)

► The Resurrection and the Rapture

■ The dead resurrected; the living raptured

All of God's saved children will have a glorious and beautiful and wonderful resurrection. The Christians who have already died and gone to be with Jesus will arise from their graves and receive new resurrection bodies. The millions of Christians who are still alive on Earth, having survived the Antichrist reign, will be instantly changed, transformed, as they also receive their new eternal bodies.

(1 Thessalonians 4:14–17; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52)

► Rewards

- The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

There will be a great feast and a great ceremony, and Jesus will pass out the gifts, the presents, the rewards to all of those who loved and served Him.

(Revelation 19:6–8)

- The judgment seat of Christ

Christians will be rewarded for their works.

(Romans 14:10–12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12)

► The Wrath of God upon Earth

- The Lord's punishments on those who rejected Him and worshipped the Antichrist

(Isaiah 13:9–11; 26:21; Revelation 14:9–10)

- The Battle of Armageddon

The wicked will gather together at Armageddon (the plains of Meggido) in Israel to try to fight the nations who are resisting the Antichrist's regime. When it looks like the antichrist is close to victory, Jesus Himself, along with His resurrected, glorified, Heavenly forces, will return to Earth again out of Heaven on majestic white horses to utterly defeat and destroy the Antichrist and his forces in the supernatural, catastrophic Battle of Armageddon. Some believe the war will last forty-five days. The battle will wipe out the very worst of the antichrist forces, leaving only those from both sides who are going to remain alive and survive through the Millennium, over whom God's children are going to rule and reign.

(Revelation 16:16; 18:19–20; Jude 14,15)

- The Antichrist and his False Prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire

(Revelation 19:20)

► The Millennium

- One thousand years of peace

Then we, the saints of God, along with our King Jesus Christ, will take over the world and set up the Kingdom of God on earth and restore it to the beauty of the Garden of Eden again. This amazing period will last for one thousand years, and therefore is known as the Millennium! During this time people will choose to follow and receive Jesus, or choose to rebel.

(Daniel 2:44, 7:27; Revelation 20:4–6, 2:26–27, 5:10)

- The Devil bound

The Devil will be bound and cast as a prisoner into the Bottomless Pit for this thousand-year period.

(Revelation 20:1–3)

► The Battle of Gog and Magog

- The final test

As a final test and sifting, at the end of the Millennium Satan is going to be released from his prison in the heart of the earth for "a little season," just long enough to deceive the remaining unconverted wicked over whom we have been ruling.

(Revelation 20:7)

- The last battle

These rebels will again follow the Devil, in open rebellion against the Lord and His government, resulting in the catastrophic Battle of Gog and Magog in which God is so fed up with them that He just sends down fire out of Heaven to devour the wicked completely! In fact, He will cause such a horrible fire to come down that it will completely wipe out the entire surface of the earth and the atmospheric heavens shall be rolled back like a scroll.

(Psalm 2:1–5; Revelation 20:8–9; 2 Peter 3:10–13)

- The Devil is cast into hell

(Revelation 20:10)

► Great White Throne Judgment

- The unsaved dead of all ages raised. The books are opened.

After this climactic Battle of Gog and Magog, all the unsaved of all ages will be raised to stand before God Himself in the final Judgment in which “the books are opened” and they will all be given their final sentences according to their works and will be assigned to their places in the hereafter.

(Revelation 20:11–15; Luke 12:47–48)

► New Heaven and New Earth

- The Heavenly City comes down to earth.

God’s great Heavenly City will then descend from above to the beautiful, recreated, Garden-of-Eden-like New Earth, and God Himself will dwell with us right here on Earth.

(Revelation 21:1–3, 22:2)

- Only the saved live in the city; unsaved nations outside.

(Revelation 21:24,27, 22:2; Hebrews 11:13–16)

- Eternal life and happiness forever

(Revelation 21:4–7, 22:3)

Closing Activity and Prayer

25 minutes

► God’s love for the lost

We’ve heard some rather dismal descriptions of the world today as well as predictions of what is yet to come. It is important to understand that although the Lord predicted these things would happen, they’re not happening the way He would want things to happen if He were running the world. (It’s a bit like reading a summary of the plot of a film before you watch it. Although you know what’s going to happen, you’re not the one who has determined the course of events.)

The Lord doesn’t like what is happening, but He has allowed mankind to have the majesty of choice—the collective choices of mankind that have brought things to the terrible state they are in now, and will yet bring humanity even closer to disaster.

The Lord would much prefer if people would choose to follow His loving ways. The world would not be in the mess it is now if people had chosen to live according to the principles of love.— But even now, despite all the horrible things that are happening, Jesus promises to forgive, help, love and comfort all those who come to Him.

2 Peter 3:9—The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

We'll discuss more about these subjects in later classes.

► Our role in the Endtime

You don't need to fear the coming tribulation if you love the Lord! Don't worry about that 3½ years of Great Tribulation! God can be a much greater Enemy to the forces of the Antichrist than they could ever be to us!

1John 4:4—You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

God's Word says that during this time:

Daniel 11:32b—The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.

The people who know Jesus are going to be strong! The worse things get, the more God's Spirit is going to be poured out from On High to help us withstand the dark evil forces that will be warring against us! The Lord has promised power for the hour, and to be with us:

Deuteronomy 33:25b—As your days, so shall your strength be.

Matthew 28:20b—Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

In the world's darkest hour of greatest iniquity, even then we're going to supernaturally, miraculously witness and shine brighter than we have ever shone before!

Romans 5:20b—Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

We are going to have an important role in this time period. Our job will be to stand up as God's witnesses and to explain to them what's happening and to lead and to encourage and to feed God's people till the very End!

Daniel 11:33a—And those of the people who understand shall instruct many.

People are going to be more desperate than ever during those dark days, and you who are faithful witnesses and know God's Word are going to win a lot of souls in that day!—Because a lot of people are going to need salvation and be more open and ready to receive the answers the Lord wants to give them than they are now.

So even during the Tribulation, we're going to continue our work for Jesus!

► Discussion

① *First check that everyone has understood the class. If you are satisfied they have grasped the main points, then ask this question and listen to their answers.*

☛ *Knowing that we're living in the "Endtime" should motivate us to do what?*

(Answers could include: Get ready for Jesus' return by getting to know Him; warn others about the coming Antichrist government; witness and get people saved; store up the Word in our hearts so we'll be ready for difficult days ahead; work on our connection with the Lord so we can clearly hear His voice; etc.)

► Prayer

- ① *Take prayer requests and finish the meeting with a good round of prayer for safekeeping. Part of the prayer should also be for the Lord to help us to be ready for His return! Claim verses when praying. (Use the Promise Verse Sets to select verses.)*