

lesson seven

MAY 12–18

Matthew 24 and **25**

“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect’ ” (Matt. 24:24, NIV).



A prism can be used to distort or alter an image by placing the prism in front of the camera's lens and turning it. Much like an image where a prism has been used, the end-time events that Jesus explains in Matthew 24 and 25 will be confusing and chaotic. But if we wait vigilantly with our lamps lit, we will be ready.

Matthew 25

Introduction

“Return” Ready!

The date: August 6, 1945.

The time: 8:16 A.M.

The event past: The bombing of Hiroshima.

Hiroshima was reported to be home to more than 280,000 civilians in addition to 43,000 soldiers. As the people went about their daily routine that morning, all were oblivious to the horrible intention of the United States to attack. As the day began for the unsuspecting Japanese that morning, a single B-29 weather plane carrying an atomic bomb made its deadly blow.

Like Israel of old, they knew not the time of their visitation.

Survivors recall the indescribable experience of the devastation that annihilated their city. For them, it was the “end of the world.” One survivor reportedly said, “All the buildings I could see were on fire.” A Protestant minister exclaimed, “This was God’s judgment on man!” Whatever the response, like Israel of old, they knew not the time of their visitation.

Were the people of this great city prepared for this attack? What could possibly have alerted them against this city’s total destruction? Will it be the same for us as we await the end of the world at the return of Jesus Christ to the earth?

World events are proving to be even more dangerous than the time of these 1945 Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. The Bible explains that “in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Tim. 3:1) . . . as if things weren’t bad enough already! It is important, then, that the children of God be prepared for what is to be the biggest shakedown ever. To this end, we look to the One who is Alpha and Omega, the One who knows the beginning from the end: Christ, the key to our preparation.

Jesus expects us to trust His sure Word of prophecy, that we might be ready as we see the day drawing near. If you are to guard yourself against deception, against worldly distractions and false spiritual alarms, you must get into the Word and stay in it daily. The Word of God teaches us how to watch and pray.

The Master is coming! May we live faithfully for Him until that day (Matt. 25:13).

REACT

1. What lessons can we apply from the parables Jesus shared about His soon return?
2. What are you doing to prepare for His second coming?
3. How can we exude greater confidence in God’s promises in our daily lives today?

It was truly a new year I will never forget. I had just attended a powerful conference—the twelfth annual GYC (Generation. Youth. Christ.) conference in Orlando, Florida. Now, as I made my way home to Toronto, complications soon began to arise. When I landed in Washington, DC, I found out that my connecting flight to Toronto was canceled due to the poor weather conditions—I would have to spend one night in Washington.

Christ wants us to enter into such an experience now.

Once I had fully come to terms with the situation, I began thinking of ways to spend my time in Washington wisely. One of the first stops on my unforeseen sightseeing excursion was the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

As I took in the many exhibits and read the heart-wrenching stories, I was beside myself with a mixture of different emotions: disbelief, anger, sadness, and grief. I could not comprehend how an expulsion of such a magnitude could have occurred (research indicates about “15 million to 20 million people died or were imprisoned”).¹ It pained me to think of the many lives that were taken—the irreplaceable generations of Jews that had been cruelly obliterated from the face of the earth.

The End of the World (2 Tim. 3:1–4)

It is not easy to ignore the Holocaust and the suffering that resulted from it. Even so, since that time, the number of senseless killings, genocides, mass murders, and other horrific crimes that have taken place in our world has only increased with time. The state of our world has been degenerating. With things the way they are in these final stages of life, the question that comes to mind is: Is there hope for any of us?

The phrase *end of the world* comes with its own set of associated images, most of them negative. Images of people screaming and running, fire, and chaos come to mind. But shouldn't the “end of the world” be a good thing? Especially when we think about the fact that it would mean freedom from this world of pain and destruction and entrance into another one, more beautiful and sweet! The truth is, we don't like dwelling on such themes because we are not ready to face them. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Strength in Adversity (Prov. 24:10; James 1:2–4; 1 Pet. 5:10)

As I wandered through the Holocaust museum, I came across accounts of the Jehovah's Witnesses. During the Holocaust, they were referred to as “voluntary prisoners” because their situation was a bit different. Unlike the Jews, who were forced into imprisonment in numerous concentration camps in con-

ditions that appeared to offer no easy way out, the Jehovah's Witnesses would have been granted their freedom at any time. They had only to retract their beliefs and submit to the authority of the Nazi leadership. Yet, few of them did.²

It is during times of adversity that one's true character is revealed (Prov. 24:10). Either you can be broken mentally or your faith can be strengthened. By choosing to lean on Christ, we can be overcomers. Focusing on our faith in Him instead of on the terrors around us is how we will prove ready to stand in that great day.

I have read many stories of people who remained strong despite the odds against them. These fearless men and women submitted to their persecutors and were not afraid to face death for their cause. In doing so, they gave the most plausible evidence that Jesus Christ exists and that His love is real. While wickedness may abound, those who prove faithful to God will be as lights in a dark room—lights that cannot be suppressed.

A More Beautiful Portrait (Matt. 28:20; 1 John 3:2, 3)

In Matthew 24, Christ Himself clears up any distorted notions about what the time before His second coming will look like. Yet with this, Christ offers words of comfort: “Be not troubled” (verse 6).

In His love and mercy, Christ gives us these signs of the times so that even though He doesn't give us the exact date of His return, we are to “watch” and “be . . . ready” (verses 42, 44), for “he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (verse 13). In this final chapter of earth's history, it is not how we start that will matter most but how we finish.

When I think about what will happen in the future, I can't help but become fearful as I imagine humankind becoming even more corrupted as time goes on and the time of great persecution that awaits the followers of Christ (verses 4–13, 15–22). But despite the terrors that await us, I believe Christ wants to paint a different picture in our minds: one of peace, love, mercy, and self-control. He wants to reveal to us the power of love over hatred, as He has through His own example and through men such as Martin Luther King Jr., who coined these words: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Christ wants us to enter into such an experience now; character transformation takes place not later—but *now* (1 John 3:2, 3).

At times, it will not be easy to live a life for Christ; it will often call for sacrifice and tears. Still, as I meditate on the Savior's love and His promise to stand by my side always, my heart swells with such hope (Matt. 28:20).

Knowing what will take place in the future is all the more reason why we need Christ and we need Him now. But we don't serve Christ out of fear; we serve Him out of love and because we know that in the end, this world will burn up—it can offer us nothing.

1. Eric Lichtblau, “The Holocaust Just Got More Shocking,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/03/sunday-review/the-holocaust-just-got-more-shocking.html>.

2. “Declaration Renouncing Beliefs,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/students/learning-materials-and-resources/jehovahs-witnesses-victims-of-the-nazi-era/declaration-renouncing-beliefs>.

Testimony *Ready or Not*

Matt. 25:1–13

A group of young people was seated in a circle on the airport floor. Each focused intensely on the game of cards in progress as they entertained themselves since their flight had been delayed. With each delay update they became increasingly complacent. Suddenly one young man looked up and exclaimed, “What’s going on here? Where is everybody?” The rest of the group looked up; they realized they were the only persons left in the departure lounge.

“I guess we were just too caught up in the game.”

They ran to the airline agent to ask for information, and she revealed that she had even called them by name, but they had not responded. “I can’t believe that you were sitting right there with your tickets and passports all along and did not hear the final boarding call. I am sorry, but the flight has already departed.”

“I guess we were just too caught up in the game.”

This true story is a modern parable of the ten virgins and underscores how easy it is for people to become distracted. Are we as young people busy playing with “the world” as opposed to watching and praying (Mark 13:32, 33)?

The advancement of technology has cultivated a life of impatience. Now every delay can be filled with some form of entertainment—entertainment that can become a great distraction from our mission.

In the parable of the ten virgins we learn that individuals handle delay differently. “He told His disciples the story of the ten virgins, by their experience illustrating the experience of the church that lives just before His second coming.

“The two classes of watchers represent the two classes who profess to be waiting for their Lord. They are called virgins because they profess a pure faith.”¹

“All had lamps and vessels for oil. For a time there was seen no difference between them. So with the church that lives just before Christ’s second coming. All have a knowledge of the Scriptures. All have heard the message of Christ’s near approach, and confidently expect His appearing. . . . A time of waiting intervenes, faith is tried; and when the cry is heard . . . many are unready. They have no oil. . . . They are destitute of the Holy Spirit.”²

REACT

1. Could it be that many in the church are in the same state of those youth at the airport—too distracted to notice the warning signs of the Second Coming?
2. What can you do to ensure that your life is not destitute of the Holy Spirit?

1. Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 406.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 408.

Matt. 7:24–27; 24:
25:1–13

Evidence *Prepare for Takeoff!*

On September 27, 2016, at the International Astronautical Congress in Guadalajara, Mexico, multimillionaire entrepreneur and inventor Elon Musk announced his plans for colonization of the planet Mars. In fear that Earth may one day be uninhabitable, some believe that this development can help preserve human life. To achieve this mission, Musk and his SpaceX company are looking to invest 10 billion dollars into this plan. They are researching to create a unique reusable rocket and capsule, capable of transporting 100 people at a time to the red planet. Although this journey may be fatal, considering the worries and chaotic state of the world, many people are applauding Musk's grandiose plan to make an alien planet habitable.*

God's Word is our source of oil.

The earth is a devastating place. Because of sin, hurricanes, earthquakes, wars, diseases, and famines are just a few reasons why many hearts are fearful and faint. But as Seventh-day Adventists, we do not take the same approach that the world does.

In Matthew 24, Jesus warns His disciples how to prepare for His coming. The past and present confirm just how accurate Christ's predictions are. Therefore, we can trust in God's not yet fulfilled predictions in our lives.

We are not fearful of the future because Jesus encourages us not to be alarmed (verse 6). He knows that the end time will not be simple and requires our focus to be on Him. Instead of worrying about earthly disasters and future persecutions, we should focus on God's Word and trust that He will prepare us for what must transpire before His coming.

When we hear and do the will of God, we are like the wise man who built his house upon a rock (Matt. 7:24–27). And, therefore, like the five wise virgins, we should constantly keep watch, making sure our vessels remain filled with oil (Matt. 25:1–13). God's Word is our source of oil. Yes, hard times will come and keeping watch may not be easy, but when we focus on Christ, He will prepare us to meet Him when He returns.

REACT

1. Many influences and distractions conflict with our Christian beliefs. How can we identify the deceptions that the world presents to us?

2. As we await Christ's return, we can become complacent. How can we ensure that we do not grow weary in our Christian journey?

* "Elon Musk Envisions Mars Colony in 8 Years' Time," *DW*, accessed January 1, 2016, <http://m.dw.com/en/elon-musk-envisions-mars-colony-in-8-years-time/a-35911138>.

How-to
*Comfort Is the Key! But
to Which Door?*

Matt. 16:25;
25:1–13

Welcome to the Laodicean period of Earth's history, when many among us enjoy the comforts of what money can bring! Food, electronics, clothes—we are rich. We have the apps on our phones, different Bible versions, commentaries, YouTube videos—we're set!

We're set!

The law of supply and demand teaches that when something is hard to obtain, its price goes up as many desire to possess it; but when something is bountiful, its value decreases and it is often taken for granted. Devotionals, Bible study programs, books, sermons, articles—you name it—all are available to us and in excess. Because of this influx of information, many say that we have no excuse not to get stronger in Christ. Although this is true, we must have learned by now that too much of a good thing can weaken this most important relationship. "How so?" you may ask. Information overload can confuse us or prevent deep study, stunting spiritual growth. Add to this the multiple distractions bombarding our senses everywhere we go. How can we navigate this danger?

First, we must recognize the danger of excess and ask God to simplify our walk with Him. God is creative at communicating what He wants us to do, so we need to be mindful of His Holy Spirit working in us. We should ask Him to guide our reading to the areas of the Bible where we will find the most help and to suggest supplemental literature. When we have received an answer from the Father, we can use this special reading selection, customized just for us, during our quiet time with Him. Quiet time is very crucial for spiritual survival and warfare. It will take discipline, perseverance, and wisdom to navigate through these seemingly calm waters. No matter where we are and what we're going through, "storing treasure in heaven" will not be easy.

Another important skill to have is that of being consistent. Stick with the program that God has given you. Replace your fears and worries of this world with the words of Jesus and His truth so that His peace will flood your life and you will become fruitful for Him.

REACT:

1. Reflect on your spiritual goals. What would you think God is calling you to do to advance the kingdom of God?
2. How serious is meeting this goal to you right now?
3. How do you think you can achieve this most important goal?

Matt. 24:4

Opinion

*Self-Deception—
a Dangerous Trend*

Imagine you're at the office and the fire alarm begins to sound. It's probably happened before, as most office buildings have fire drills at least once a year. What do you do? Do you say a prayer for the protection of everyone in the building and then head for the door? Or do you snatch up all the things that are important to you before hightailing to the nearest exit? What is our first instinct when there is danger to the things we own? Do we trust that God will always provide, or do we try our hardest to save our things because we don't know when we will get our next ones?

For Jesus, it was never “All About ME, ME, ME.”

In the Scripture reference for today, Jesus says, “ ‘Watch out that no one deceives you’ ” (NIV). The danger for all of us now is that we sometimes don't recognize that the one who is deceiving me is me. Remember the story of King David and Uriah? David did a great injustice to Uriah by impregnating his wife and then ensuring his death. When Nathan the prophet told David the parable that depicted what David had done, David became enraged and pronounced death for such an odious man. Nathan's simple declaration, “ ‘You are the man!’ ” (2 Sam. 12:7) must have left David speechless.

When self becomes our focus, the man Jesus disappears from our view. It doesn't happen all at once. Slowly, the things of the world become more important. Studying for that university degree takes the place of studying our Bible; dressing in the latest fashion takes the place of girding our loins with righteousness. We get very concerned about becoming a better *you*. But we forget the man Jesus who knows just who the best *you* is.

Jesus gave us instructions on how to become the best *you* ever. You can't find it in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, or even in the *New You Magazine*. No, the instructions about becoming the best *you*, the person who is preparing to enter God's everlasting kingdom, are found in the Bible. Jesus, who came to earth to be our living example, is our best life coach.

Jesus was not concerned about Himself. For Jesus, it was never “All About ME, ME, ME,” as a T-shirt I once owned read. Jesus was always saying that He and His Father are One, and He acted the part. We truly must become one with our heavenly Father as we continue on our journey toward salvation.

REFLECT

1. Do we honestly find ourselves sometimes more concerned with possessions than people?
2. Would we recognize the selfishness in ourselves if someone else didn't point it out?

Jannelle Spencer, Brittons Hill, St. Michael, Barbados

Exploration

Your Choice: The Great Hope

Matt. 24:6

CONCLUDE

Yes, Christ is coming, and though we see in Matthew 24 and 25 the terrible consequences of living without Christ, I'm here to affirm to you that you don't have to be part of the five foolish virgins. You don't have to be the man with the one talent, and you don't have to be the one who does not feed the poor. You have the power to choose otherwise. I know of the destruction; but I am also very much aware of the great hope in Christ Jesus. You and those you touch have hope in Jesus. Be aware of all the tragedy, watch and pray, but also be aware that you have Jesus.

CONSIDER

- Starting a YouTube Channel where once a week you share the joys and the beauty of the Second Coming or the life of Christ. Focus on texts that inspire and encourage people to embrace the Great Hope.
- Starting a book club to read books like *The Story of Redemption*, or *The Great Hope* by Ellen G. White.
- Starting a prayer group. Meet for 30 minutes to an hour to encourage and uplift and pray for preparation to meet Jesus.
- Having a poetry jam or art exhibit. Invite your friends to compose poetry on the second coming of Christ Jesus or drawings of heaven. Use a theme for each event.
- Holding a musical concert themed "Heaven" or "The Great Hope." Use readings and poetry, songs, and instrumentals that surround the theme of Christ's return. The musical concert can tell the story of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and return of Christ.
- Composing Scripture songs on verses that talk about heaven or on promises that encourage people to overcome.
- Going through Matthew 24 and 25 again. On a sheet of paper, make two headings: "Negative End Times" and "Positive End Times." Investigate and write under each heading all the negative (e.g., wars, rumors of war, five foolish virgins) and then all the positive (e.g., five wise virgins, feed the poor, be not troubled) Make a decision to choose to be in the positive.

CONNECT

Job 19:25–27; Isaiah 66:22, 23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Jude 24, 25; Revelation 14:1–5; 22:12–14.

Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, chapter 61, "Deliverance of the Saints"; *The Great Hope*.

Beverly E. Toppin, Bridgetown, Barbados