

What on Earth Is Going On
Luke 21:12-19; Daniel 9
“The Church Age”

Introduction

I never cease to be amazed at The Word of God! There is no possible way that I could ever be convinced that The Holy Bible isn't divinely inspired, for it is so profoundly deep that no human being could have ever conceived of its revelations. Though it was written by authors who were very human, it was inspired by The Holy Spirit, and it's wisdom is unparalleled in any other writings. When God decides to reveal a truth, that revealing is unmistakable, and yet, when this same God wishes for something to be concealed, then it is shrouded in impenetrable mystery. A perfect example of this reality can be found in the “Church Age”, which is the time period that the church will be left upon the earth for the purpose of spreading the gospel. It has also been called “The Age of Grace” by many. For so long as The Church exists upon this earth, then the gospel will be preached throughout the world giving sinners the opportunity to receive God's amazing grace. However, we know by reading the scriptures that this Church Age will not last forever. A time is coming when the world will be plunged into darkness for the sins that it has committed against God. The Church will no longer be present to offer its light in these darkened times. But no one, save The Father in Heaven, knows exactly when this present church age will come to an end.

The beginning of the Church age, however, was predicted in the book of Daniel with perfect accuracy. Once again, proving that God has shown us exactly what He wants us to see and has hidden from us what He wants to remain hidden. This morning we will be studying the “Church Age”, as described by Jesus in His “Olivet Discourse”, as well as, by the prophet Daniel in his prophecy of the “Seventy Sevens” found in **Daniel Chapter 9**. Within the “Days of the Gentiles” that we studied last week, we will find a period of grace. A period of time in which God will extend His hand of mercy to save any who will believe upon the Name of His Son, before it is too late. We are living in those marvelous days of grace that were predicted so many years before in the Book of Daniel.

In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus explained that as the end drew near there would be earthquakes, wars, diseases, and false prophets in ever increasing measure. Last week we discussed at length how these things were ever increasing as we look around us. There can be little doubt that we are getting closer to the last days, for we are seeing these prophetic predictions unfold before our very eyes. Jesus also told His disciples that before these “last days” come, those who follow Him will be severely persecuted by this wicked world. From **verse 12-19 of Luke's Gospel**, Jesus begins to pull back from speaking of the end times, to warn His followers of the trials that they would themselves endure before all these things would come to pass. They would face tremendous hardships as the Age of the Church was in it's infancy. Satan would do everything in his power to silence their testimony, but Christ commanded them to endure. Their faithfulness to His gospel is the reason that we are all standing here today. They never shirked their responsibility to make disciples, even in the face of terrible persecution. These followers were willing to give their lives in the furtherance of the gospel. We are to be no less committed today. The purpose of the church during this Age of Grace is to “go and make disciples” (**Matthew 28:18-20**). We MUST do this in all urgency and haste, for the darkness is fast approaching (**John 9:4**). The “Church Age” will not last forever.

Today we will examine the “Church Age”. We will see it's beginning as prophesied by Daniel, and we will see the signs to look for as it comes to an end. Hopefully, we will see the necessity of doing all that we can do to reach those who are lost while there is yet time. We begin our study this morning with: The Seventy Weeks, The Slow Fade, and The Sound of The Trumpet.

The Seventy Weeks

As we discussed last week, the nation of Israel was carried off into Babylonian captivity for their sins (circa 605 BC). Daniel was a young prince who was taken among the first captives of Babylon and was forced to serve in the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet Jeremiah had foretold the period of Babylonian exile would last for seventy years (**Jeremiah 25:9-11**). By the **ninth chapter of the book of Daniel**, we see Daniel as an old man in his eighties. The seventy years are almost over, and Daniel is praying for Israel's return to her homeland. He realizes that he himself is far too old to make the arduous journey, but he longs to see his nation restored. Although he understands that Israel must remain under the rule of Gentiles (**Daniel 2**), he nevertheless petitions God to allow his countrymen to return home as had been promised. The Babylonian empire had by then already fallen to the Medes and Persians (**Daniel 5**), and Darius the Mede was reigning over the city of Babylon. Daniel's prayer can be seen in **verses 3-19**. As one commentator has so aptly put it, "The prayer lasts for approximately three minutes, and when Daniel opened his eyes, there stood Gabriel who had come all the way from heaven!" We too have access to this same God, who answers prayer. There is no need for us to fear in these troubled days in which we live. He will never leave us, nor forsake us. He hears us when we pray. He is an ever present help in time of trouble (**Psalms 46:1**).

I love what Paul says about God in **Ephesians 3:20**. He says that God **"is able to do more than all we ask or imagine..."**. Daniel prayed a simple prayer asking God if He would keep His promise and let the children of Israel return home, and God gives him an answer that was far more than he had asked or imagined! Gabriel not only reassures Daniel that the Israelites would certainly be returning home soon, but He also lays out for him in great detail God's perfect plan to bring reconciliation and everlasting righteousness (**vs. 24**). In other words, God told Daniel when The Messiah (Jesus) would come to Jerusalem to be crucified, and the Church Age would begin. He not only revealed the timing of this miraculous event, He told Daniel THE EXACT DAY that it would happen! The prophecy is known as "The Seventy Weeks".

The word "weeks" is actually better translated as "sevens". God told Daniel that seventy "sevens" had been set aside to bring righteousness to the nation of Israel. This actually means that there would be seventy "seven year" periods of time that God had foreordained to accomplish His purposes. The groups of seven are broken down into three separate groups. The first group of "seven sevens" represent the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the decree of King Artaxerxes found in **Nehemiah Chapter 2**. The Bible gives us a specific date of this decree given to Nehemiah that allows him to go and begin the process of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The decree was issued on Nisan 1, 445BC (**Nehemiah 2:1**). This rebuilding took 49 years (7x7) and was completed at a time that coincides with the last book written in the *Old Testament*, Malachi.

The next set of "sevens" follows the previous one consecutively and speaks of 62 "sevens" (434 years) at which time The Messiah would present Himself in the city of Jerusalem to be cut off (**vs 26**). In the Hebrew vernacular, to be "cut off" means to be killed and to have no offspring. Jesus The Messiah was killed in Jerusalem the very same week that He presented Himself in the Temple during the time of passover. He was thirty-three years old, and was struck down in the prime of His life, with no offspring to carry on his name. He was in Hebrew terms "cut off" from His people. But, here is the really amazing part: From the issuance of the decree of Artaxerxes on Nisan 1 (445 BC), to the day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Nisan 10 (AD 32) to present Himself as the Passover Lamb, was sixty nine sevens (483 years $7+62=69 \times 7=483$). Simply put, when you examine these two dates according to the Jewish lunar calendar, from the time Artaxerxes' decree to the time when Jesus presented Himself in Jerusalem is 483 years TO THE DAY! Daniel was told EXACTLY when The Age of The Church would begin and usher in an era of righteousness.

Now I know what you are thinking. What about the seventieth seven? Notice how it is discussed separately from the others? This final seven is not consecutive with the other sixty nine sevens. It speaks of another separate seven year period of time. This is the time of the Antichrist (**vs. 27**). This "seven" represents the seven year tribulation period that will occur in the last days. It has been called in the *Old Testament*, The Day of The LORD. There is a large gap that will occur between

the 69th and 70th “seven”. The length of that particular period of time is shrouded in mystery. God has no intention of telling us just how long that this period will last, He simply commands that we remain “ready”, for the end will come as a thief in the night (**Matthew 24:42-43; 1 Thessalonians 5:1**). The sixty-nine “sevens” have already taken place, just as God had said they would. The seventieth “seven” will happen just as surely, but we just have no idea of when. Jesus did, however, give us some signs to look for as the time draws near. Some we discussed last week: wars, rumors of wars, racial division, earthquakes, famines and diseases. Today we will look at other things that must happen as we are nearing the end of The Church Age. The Bible tells us that there will be a “falling away” of those who believe, followed by a sounding of a trumpet, when God calls His children out of this sinful world.

The Slow Fade

Jesus once asked His disciples the question, **“When The Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)**. According to the scriptures, there will be a great “falling away” from the faith as the end times approach. Jesus said in The Olivet Discourse that “because of the increase of wickedness, the love of many would grow cold” (**Matthew 24:12**). Paul warned us in **2 Thessalonians 2:3** that before the Antichrist can come upon the scene, there must be a great “falling away” from the faith. I think that it is pretty obvious these days, that true Christianity is in decline. Our country becomes more secular every single day. The Christian values that once bound us together as a people are being increasingly mocked and ridiculed from every direction these days. A belief system that was once held in high esteem by our citizenry is now being viewed as one of bigotry and hatred. Once was a time when even pagans in our society had respect for the people of faith, but no more. Wickedness and perversion are celebrated in our culture, while morality and purity are scorned. The only “Christians” that aren’t being marginalized and made fun of these days are the ones who are willing to compromise the teachings of scripture. In other words, the only accepted “Christians” in our society aren’t really Christians at all. Jesus taught us that **if we love Him we WILL obey His commands (John 14:15)**, so to disregard the teachings of scripture is to prove that we have no love for Christ. Oh, how we as a society have “fallen away” from truth in these last days! Our zeal for living according to The Word of God is slowly fading away before our very eyes.

Paul warns us that this will happen immediately prior to the appearing of the Antichrist. He also describes for us the depravity of mankind in the last days before the Church Age comes to an end:

***But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days
People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful,
proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy
without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal,
not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of
pleasure, rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness,
But denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.***

2 Timothy 3:1-5

Wow! Sounds like that came from the pages of today’s headlines doesn’t it? Welcome to the last days. The love of many is growing cold. Most people today are more interested in living for themselves, than they are in living for The kingdom of God. Once again *The Bible* is spot on, when it comes to the prophesy of the last days.

The Sound of The Trumpet

The Apostle Paul was very forthcoming about the end of the church age with the Church at Thessalonica (*Thessalonike* in the Greek). Apparently there were rumors in that first century church that they had actually missed the return of Christ. Needless to say, that would cause no small amount of panic within the church. Paul addressed their fears in two separate letters (**1 & 2 Thessalonians**). He wanted to reassure them that the Day of The Lord had not occurred and would not occur until

certain events had taken place. One being the “falling away” that we discussed in the previous section, and the other being The Rapture of The Church (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**). Paul explains that with a loud shout and the “sounding of the trumpet”, we, the church, would be gathered to Jesus in the air to reunite with all those faithful saints that have preceded us in death. We need not fear the terrible things that will happen during the tribulation period for we, The Church, have not been appointed to suffer God’s wrath upon the wicked (**1 Thessalonians 5:9**). The Church Age will come to an end when the trumpet sounds and the Church is “caught up in the air” (**1 Thessalonians 4:17**). Many Churches today have abandoned the doctrine of The Rapture saying that the word “rapture” is found nowhere in scriptures. If that is their argument, then neither is the word “Trinity” for that matter, but *The Bible* clearly teaches that doctrine! The word “*rapture*” actually means to be “*caught up*”. It is where we derive our word “*raptor*”, which is used for birds of prey who snatch up their victims and carry them away to be eaten. Paul tells the Thessalonian Church that they needn’t worry about missing The Day of The Lord, for they will be “caught up” in the air when that day comes. And, THAT would be kind of hard to miss!

Furthermore, it will be absolutely necessary for The Church to be taken away, BEFORE the Antichrist can come to power. Listen to the words of Paul:

***“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day (The Day of The Lord) will not come until the falling away occurs, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s Temple proclaiming himself to be God. Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but The One who now holds it back will continue to do so till He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom The Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the splendor of His coming.*”**

2 Thessalonians 2:3-8

And just WHO is the “ONE”, who is now holding back the antichrist from coming into the world? The Holy Spirit, that’s who. And where does the Holy Spirit live? Within The Church! You see, when the Church is raptured, then the presence of The Spirit that is now holding back the forces of evil in this wicked world will be taken out of the way. This is by no means saying that The Spirit of God will play no role in the Tribulation Period, but His manifest presence in The Church of Jesus Christ will be taken away. Nothing will be standing against the demonic forces of evil that are now being retrained from having complete dominion over the earth. With The Church gone, it will be literally hell on earth for seven long and horrific years. When The Church age ends, the tribulation begins.

Are you ready of Jesus to come back? If the sound of the trumpet came today, would you rise to meet him in the air, or would you be left behind to endure the wrath of God? Jesus is coming soon. The signs are everywhere. Make sure that you are ready to meet Him today. If we look around, we can clearly see that we are living in the last days. I don’t know about you this morning, but I am looking forward to our departure. I’ve seen enough of what this old world has to offer, and I long to see His Kingdom come, and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven! (**Matthew 6:10**). The Church Age is drawing to a close. People get ready, soon we’ll be going home!

And ALL of God’s people said... TRUTH!!!