

Di223 We Believe

Lesson Di223-25 Signs the Rapture is Near

Jesus was a master storyteller. One of the stories he told had to do with his coming for the Church. It was the story of ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of the women were wise and five were foolish. The foolish virgins took their lamps but forgot to bring extra oil with them. The wise virgins took their lamps and brought oil in jars as well. They all waited for the bridegroom but his coming was delayed. The ten virgins fell asleep while they were waiting. At midnight they heard the loud cry that the bridegroom was arriving and all should come out to meet him. The wise virgins woke up and got their lamps ready. The foolish virgins asked the wise ones to share their extra oil, because their lamps were going out. The wise women refused because they only had enough oil for their own lamps. They suggested the others should try to find a merchant and buy more oil.

While the five foolish women were trying to find oil, the bridegroom arrived. The wise virgins were ready and entered with him into the wedding banquet. The door was shut. The foolish virgins arrived later and asked to enter the door. They were rejected. The doorkeeper told the latecomers, “I don’t know you.” Jesus ended the story by saying, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour [of my coming]” (Matt 25:1-13).

What are the signs of the Rapture—Christ’s coming for the Church?

1. The first sign of Christ’s coming is the return of Jews to Israel. The Old Testament Israelites repeatedly disobeyed God. God scattered them among other nations for their sin. He promised them deliverance and blessing for repenting and obeying. God spoke through the prophet, “I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land” (Ezek 36:24). On May 14, 1948, Jews who had returned to their Promised Land declared part of Palestine to be the independent state of Israel. The regathering was not complete, but it had begun. The country of Israel continues to grow in population and military strength. This is the beginning fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy.

2. The second sign of Christ’s coming is the “perilous times” prophesied by Jesus in Matthew, chapter 24. Jesus warned of the deceivers who would come saying they are prophets of God or even newly revealed ‘messiahs’ (like Jesus). “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Matt 24:12). The apostle Paul, aware of the truth Jesus had preached, warned Timothy: “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” (2Tim 3:1-5).

3. The third sign of Christ’s coming is wars and rumors of war. Jesus prophesied, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt 24:6-7). The New Testament warns us not to expect peace as the last days come upon us: “While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly” (1Thess 5:3). Even while states are trying to stabilize their governments, war may be breaking out in other places.

Rumors of smaller countries trying to develop nuclear weapons prove that most nations are expecting more war and fighting, not less.

4. The fourth sign of Christ's coming is the increase in knowledge. The prophet Daniel said that near the time of the end, "Many will go here and there to increase knowledge" (12:4). This verse speaks of travel from one location to another. In the twenty-first century, even remote nations can be reached by jet travel. Mobile phones outnumber people in our world today. Computers and satellite signals provide virtual travel worldwide in seconds. The increase in knowledge is hard to comprehend. Information and technical data explode in data bases and electronic bulletin boards. Science and medicine are making giant strides in research and cures. These are all part of the predicted increase in knowledge of the end times.

5. The fifth sign of Christ's coming is natural disasters. Jesus said, "There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains" (Matt 24:7-8). There have always been natural tragedies which have taken a toll in human lives, but the frequency of such events—fires, floods, volcanic eruptions, and epidemics—is on the increase. The number and size of disasters around the world remind us that end-time prophecies are being fulfilled.

All these signs of the end times and of the rapture of the Church are being fulfilled. Jesus could return at any time. Everything is already in place for this Blessed Hope.

This lesson is **important** because it discusses five signs of Christ's coming for his Church—his bride. Just as the prophecies about Jesus' first coming were fulfilled, these about his Second Coming are being fulfilled. Everything prophesied about Christ's return seems to have come to pass already. This teaches us to be ready, because he could come any time.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the five signs of Christ's second coming are happening right now in our world today. We must be ready like the five wise virgins in Christ's parable.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. Why are five virgins out of the ten called 'foolish' in Jesus' parable? [Pause.]
A. If you answered, "Five are called 'foolish' because they were unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom," you are correct.
2. Name the five signs of Christ's coming for his Church. [Pause.]
A. If you answered, "The return of the Jews to Israel, perilous times, wars and rumors of wars, increase of knowledge, and increase in natural disasters, you answered correctly.
3. In view of the signs of Christ's soon return, what must we do? [Pause.]
A. If you answered, "We must be ready to meet Christ when he returns," you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to memorize our twelfth *Statement of Faith*: "We believe the blessed hope of the Church is Christ's return from heaven to 'catch up' the Christians who have died, together with those who are alive, to be with him forever." Also learn the **Memory Verse**: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, ... with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Thess 4:16-17). Share with at least two other persons about the soon return of Christ, the signs of his coming, and how to be ready.