

Lesson
21

“What Is the Sign of Thy Coming?”

Joseph Smith—Matthew (Matthew 24)

Purpose

To help class members recognize the signs that will precede the Savior’s Second Coming and to encourage members to prepare themselves for this great event.

Preparation

1. Read, ponder, and pray about the following scriptures:
 - a. Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:1–20 (Matthew 24:1–5, 9–13, 15–22). Jesus foretells the impending destruction of Jerusalem.
 - b. Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:21–55 (Matthew 24:6–8, 14, 23–51). Jesus describes the signs that will precede his Second Coming and teaches how his elect can prepare for his coming.
2. Additional reading: Mark 13; Luke 21:5–38; Doctrine and Covenants 45:15–55.
3. If the picture *The Second Coming* (62562; Gospel Art Picture Kit 238) is available, use it during the lesson.
4. Suggestion for teaching: A call to teach does not require that you know everything about the gospel, so you should not feel embarrassed if a class member asks a question that you cannot answer. Instead of making up an answer, admit that you do not know and offer to try to find an answer.

Suggested Lesson Development**Attention Activity**

As appropriate, use the following activity or one of your own to begin the lesson:

Have class members look out a window and observe the sky. If there is not a window in the classroom, ask class members what the weather was like when they arrived at church. Then make an improbable prediction about the weather. For example, if the sky is clear and it is hot outside, predict that it will snow in a few hours. If it is cold and rainy outside and it appears that the rain will continue for a while, predict that it will be hot and dry outside within five minutes.

Ask class members what they think about your prediction. After they have commented, ask the following questions:

- What is your prediction about the weather in the next few hours? What helps you make that prediction?
- How might the signs of upcoming weather conditions influence the things we do? (Answers may include that we often make preparations based on these signs. For example, we may make plans for outdoor activities when it appears that the weather will be pleasant, or we may make special preparations to withstand a severe storm.)

Point out that predicting the weather is one situation in which we rely on signs to help us prepare for upcoming events. If we watch the signs, we reduce our chances of being caught unprepared. Similarly, watching for the signs of the

Second Coming of Jesus Christ can help us prepare for that great event. This lesson discusses some of the signs that Jesus prophesied would precede his Second Coming. (You may want to point out that a prediction specifies something that *may* happen, while a prophecy specifies something that *will* happen. A prediction about the weather may turn out to be wrong, but the prophecies about the Second Coming will all be fulfilled.)

Scripture Discussion
and Application

As you teach the following scripture passages, help class members understand that the Lord has revealed information to help us prepare for his Second Coming. In spite of the tribulations of the last days, we can look forward with joy to this great event.

Explain that Matthew 24 contains the Savior's prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem and about his Second Coming. Over time, the verses in this chapter have been changed and rearranged, making it sometimes difficult to understand which event a particular verse describes. Fortunately, as part of his inspired translation of the Bible, Joseph Smith clarified the two prophecies and restored additional information. His inspired translation of Matthew 24 is found in Joseph Smith—Matthew in the Pearl of Great Price.

Use the Joseph Smith—Matthew account as you discuss the doctrines and principles in this lesson. Display the picture of the Second Coming throughout the lesson.

1. Jesus foretells the impending destruction of Jerusalem.

Discuss Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:1–20 (see also Matthew 24:1–5, 9–13, 15–22). Invite class members to read selected verses.

- A few days before Jesus was crucified, some of his disciples accompanied him to the Mount of Olives. What two questions did the disciples ask Jesus? (See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:4. Explain that Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:5–20 is the Savior's answer to their first question, which was about the destruction of Jerusalem. Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:21–55 is the Savior's answer to their second question, which was about his Second Coming.)
- What did Jesus prophesy about the temple in Jerusalem and the city itself? (See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:2–3, 12.) What signs did the Savior prophesy would precede the destruction of Jerusalem? (See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:5–10.)
- What did Jesus tell his followers to do to avoid destruction? (See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:11–15.) Why was it important that they not return to their homes once they had fled? (See Luke 9:62; D&C 133:14–15.)

Explain that although many Jews did not believe their great city and temple could be destroyed, the Lord's prophecies were fulfilled in A.D. 70. Believing that the Messiah would come and help them in battle, the Jews revolted against the Romans in A.D. 66. Four years later the Romans had destroyed the entire city. Those who listened to the Savior and fled into the mountains were spared. Those who did not heed this counsel were scattered and destroyed.

2. Jesus describes the signs that will precede his Second Coming.

Read and discuss selected verses from Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:21–55 (see also Matthew 24:6–8, 14, 23–51). Remind class members that the second

question asked by the disciples concerned the Savior's Second Coming and the accompanying destruction of the wicked (which is sometimes called "the end of the world"). As you discuss the signs and tribulations that will precede the Second Coming, list them on the chalkboard.

- What sign of the Savior's Second Coming is described in Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:22? What evidence do you see that this prophecy is being fulfilled? How can we avoid being deceived by false prophets? (See Matthew 7:15–20; D&C 45:57; 46:7–8.)
- What sign of the Second Coming is mentioned in Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:23 and 28? What evidence do you see that this prophecy is being fulfilled? The Lord taught that we should "be not troubled" by wars and rumors of war. How can we find peace during such troubled times? (See 1 John 4:16–18; D&C 6:34–36; 45:34–35; 59:23.)

Elder M. Russell Ballard gave the following counsel of hope and encouragement:

"Although the prophecies tell us that these things are to take place, more and more people are expressing great alarm at what appears to be an acceleration of worldwide calamity. . . . Admittedly we have ample reason to be deeply concerned because we see no immediate answers to the seemingly unsolvable problems confronting the human family. But regardless of this dark picture, which will ultimately get worse, we must never allow ourselves to give up hope! . . .

" . . . The Lord is in control. He knows the end from the beginning. He has given us adequate instruction that, if followed, will see us safely through any crisis. His purposes will be fulfilled, and someday we will understand the eternal reasons for all of these events. Therefore, today we must be careful not to overreact, nor should we be caught up in extreme preparations; but what we must do is keep the commandments of God and never lose hope!

"But where do we find hope in the midst of such turmoil and catastrophe? Quite simply, our one hope for spiritual safety during these turbulent times is to turn our minds and our hearts to Jesus Christ. . . . Armed with the shield of faith, we can overcome many of our daily challenges and overpower our greatest weaknesses and fears, knowing that if we do our best to keep the commandments of God, come what may, we will be all right" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1992, 41–43; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 31–32).

- What signs of the Second Coming are described in Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:27 and 31? How are these prophecies being fulfilled today? (Missionary work is increasing, and the gospel is being taught and accepted in more and more places around the world.) What can each of us do to help fulfill these prophecies?
- What signs of the Second Coming are described in Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29–30? What evidence do you see that these prophecies are being fulfilled? What have latter-day prophets counseled us to do to prepare for the natural disasters that will precede the Second Coming?
- What signs of the Second Coming are mentioned in Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:32–33?

- The Lord told his followers in Jerusalem to “stand in the holy place” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:12), and he has given similar counsel in our day (D&C 87:8; 101:22). What are some holy places in which we should stand? How will these places help protect us during the difficulties of the last days?

President Ezra Taft Benson said, “Holy men and holy women stand in holy places, and these holy places include our temples, our chapels, our homes, and the stakes of Zion, which are, as the Lord declares, ‘for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth’ (D&C 115:6)” (“Prepare Yourselves for the Great Day of the Lord,” *Brigham Young University 1981 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* [1981], 68).

- What guidance did Jesus give to help us not be deceived in the last days before his Second Coming? (See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37.) How can we treasure up the Lord’s word? How has treasuring up the Lord’s word helped you avoid being deceived?
- What did Jesus teach in the following passages to help us prepare for his Second Coming?
 - a. The parable of the fig tree (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38–40).
 - b. The comparison of the Second Coming to the days of Noah (verses 41–43).
 - c. The prophecy of two people working in the field and two people grinding at the mill (verses 44–46).
 - d. The parable of the good man and the thief (verses 47–48).
 - e. The parable of the lord and his servants (verses 49–54).
- Why is it important that we continuously watch and prepare for the Lord’s coming? How can we watch and prepare to meet the Lord?
- What will happen to the righteous when the Savior comes again? (See Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37, 44–45, 50; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18; D&C 88:96–98.)

Conclusion

Testify that the scriptural prophecies about Jesus Christ’s Second Coming will all be fulfilled. Emphasize that by studying the teachings of the Savior and following the counsel of the living prophets, we can prepare ourselves to meet Christ. If we are prepared, the Second Coming will be a wonderful day for us.

Additional Teaching Idea

The following material supplements the suggested lesson outline. You may want to use this idea as part of the lesson.

Signs of the Second Coming revealed in latter days

Explain that the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation that repeated and clarified the prophecies given to Jesus’ ancient disciples. This revelation is found in Doctrine and Covenants 45. Have class members compare Doctrine and Covenants 45:15–55 to Joseph Smith—Matthew.

You may want to point out that in Doctrine and Covenants 45:60–61, the Lord told Joseph Smith to begin translating the New Testament. Joseph Smith—Matthew is part of this inspired translation.