

## Welcome to BNEXT

I am excited to share this journey through God's Word with you. As we study Scripture, we see an unfolding revelation of who God is, the nature of Jesus, and how we can become stronger in our walk with Christ. It is important that we study Scripture for ourselves — allowing the Holy Spirit to enlighten us (Acts 17:11).

The Scripture covered by each lesson is listed on the top-right side of the masthead of the page. Read the Scripture passages and then begin working your way through the lesson. Each lesson in this series contains three pages of commentary, followed by three pages of questions that will assist you to dig deeper and reflect on God's Word.

We have also included a Leader's Guide that will enable anyone to facilitate a small group. Once you have completed this BNEXT study, I hope you will consider leading others through this material — whether it is a group of friends, your church, or as a ministry outreach. (See the Leader's Guide at the end of this study for more information.)

Again, thank you for allowing me to share this amazing journey with you.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,

Handwritten signature of William P. Campbell in blue ink.

**William P. Campbell**

Founder & President | Scripture Awakening

## BNEXT Participant's Guide

Thank you for choosing BNEXT Bible study curriculum. To help you get the most out of your study, please take a few minutes to read this information before you begin. Studying the Bible is much like going on a journey — it takes us to new places in our understanding and our walk with God. The Word of God is transformative — it's living and active, can build up our faith, and call us to move beyond where we are.

Using this curriculum, you may journey alone, or travel with others in a small group, or even engage as an entire congregation (with small groups as part of the program). Groups gather once a week to review what was read, to share answers to discussion questions, and to deepen their understanding.

## About This Study

This electronic version of the Participant's Guide contains the same material as the printed version. It allows you to electronically record your answers to the questions which are part of each lesson. Following each question, you will find a blue text box. Click or touch the box and the field within it will turn white allowing you to type in your answer. Your answer will automatically be saved when you exit the text box. Should you need more space for your answer, the text box will automatically expand and insert a scroll bar on the right-hand side.

## Things to Know

These studies are designed to be used in many different settings— individuals, congregations (separating into small groups), Sunday school classes, prison ministries, military, business groups— virtually anywhere a small group can be formed. Experience has shown that participants find the small group experience to be greatly beneficial. The input and interaction with others will broaden your perspective and stimulate your thinking about Scripture.

The lessons are designed to be done throughout the week. Each lesson contains a few pages of commentary, followed by study questions. There are three types of questions: Devotion (Personal Questions), Discussion (Small Group), and Digging Deeper (Further Study). While participants may use any Bible translation they prefer, all of the Biblical quotations in BNEXT studies are from the New International Version (NIV).

Plan your daily reading. The Scripture readings are located on the right side of the masthead of each lesson. Some lessons may cover a few chapters of a book (such as Genesis 1-11 in the series, *In the Beginning*). Longer readings may be broken down into more manageable daily readings, which may take some thoughtful planning. Some readings are as short as a few verses and will not present any difficulties. Some topical studies do not have assigned Scripture readings.

If you are meeting in a small group, be sure to first read and complete the lesson before the gathering. Once a week, your group will meet to spend time (about an hour) discussing the lesson and sharing personal insights.

More of our resources and study aids can be found at [ScriptureAwakening.com](http://ScriptureAwakening.com). Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments at [info@scriptureawakening.com](mailto:info@scriptureawakening.com).



But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:20

### Introduction

The *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins made the top bookseller's list not only in the Christian arena but also in the secular world. Throughout history, mankind has been intrigued with the end times—when will the world end? Can we know ahead of time? Are there special events or signs that we should be aware of? Is there anything we can do to be ready?

Why this sudden (or on-going) interest in the annihilation of the world? You are about to enter one of the most climactic scenes in the drama of Biblical prophecy—the Olivet Discourse. Packed into a single chapter of the Bible is a sermon from our Lord that draws together prophetic insight spanning thousands of years. This discourse looks back to the visions of Daniel (in the book of Daniel) and looks forward to the visions of John (in the book of Revelation), bringing the combined weight of their relevance to bear on our lives today.

In Matthew, Jesus delivers three discourses:

1. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) dealing with the principles of His kingdom.
2. The Parables of the Kingdom (Matthew 13) relating the stages of His kingdom.
3. The Olivet Discourse (chapter 24) revealing the culmination of His kingdom when He returns to reign forever.

The Olivet Discourse is recorded in three of the four Gospels—Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Scripture records, “A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (Deuteronomy 19:15b; Matthew 18:16b). The Spirit of God assured that we would have three witnesses of this last days sermon. Just as a beautiful piece of art is best admired through the combined effect of different perspectives, so can we best appreciate this discourse by studying it in three different Gospels. Our main focus, however, will be the Gospel of Matthew, the most complete rendering of Jesus’ discourse.

### The End of the Age

Matthew 23 closes with Christ's lament over Jerusalem and the prediction of her coming desolation (Matthew 23:37-39). The disciples called Jesus' attention to the grand and glorious Temple built for the Jews by King Herod. This was the largest and most expensive temple the Jewish people had ever known. Perhaps the disciples were in essence saying, “But look at this! Surely this beautiful structure will remain.” Their regard for the Temple was paramount. This was their heritage, their solace, their hope, their peace, their safety, and a dwelling place on earth for the Most High God to identify with His chosen people, Israel.

Our Lord's response must have shocked them all when he said, “Do you see all these things?” He asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). This prophecy was fulfilled in detail in AD 70 when Titus, a Roman general, led his army into Jerusalem to destroy and burn the Temple. As this magnificent structure burned, the gold melted and poured into the cracks of the huge stone walls. The looting soldiers anxiously pounded the stones to retrieve the gold and thus pulled down the walls stone

Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, claiming ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

Matthew 24:4,5

by stone.

Not sure what to make of this, the disciples later came to Him privately and asked three pertinent questions, “‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?’” (Matthew 24:3)? A modern paraphrase might be, “Lord, tell us now! When is all of this going to happen? How can we know it’s really You? Will there be some kind of supernatural phenomena we can look for so we’ll know it’s truly the end? Tell us Jesus! Tell us!”

Notice how their question clustered three events into one. This is not surprising, for the Old Testament prophets, who spoke clearly about end-time events, did not often bring clarification to the chronology or timing of such events.

The disciples, living two millennia ago with only the Old Testament as their guide, tended to lump Jesus’ description of the destruction of the Jewish Temple together with His second coming and the term “the end of the age.” The challenge is for us to pull them apart, for Christ answered their questions in one blended explanation. It appears that our Lord addressed all three portions of their question in this order:

- The signs of end of the age (Matthew 24:1-14)
- The destruction of Jerusalem and a later, but parallel, end-time tribulation (Matthew 24:15-22)
- The time of His Second Coming to gather His own (Matthew 24:23-31)

Just as a cloud gathering on the horizon may appear to an observer as one huge mass until it passes overhead, revealing individually spaced clusters like white clumps of cotton. In the same way, prophecy is best understood when its fulfillment is imminent or even complete.

### Signs of the End

Our Lord described various signs of the end of the age in Matthew 24:1-14. It may be pointed out that many of these signs have been part of the world since the time of Christ. But our Lord shows the compounding relevance of the signs listed with the injected phrases, “Such things must happen, but the end is still to come” (Matthew 24:6b). “All these are the beginning of birth pains” (Matthew 24:8).

In Matthew 24:33, we find a possible key for applying the relevance of these signs to any given generation: “Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.” This verse suggests that the issue at hand is not whether the signs have occurred at various times in history but when the generation will arise for which the signs all occur at once. The crowning evidence that the end is near is described by our Lord in Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Many of the signposts given by Christ regarding the end of time are the very things we are wise

Now, brothers and sisters,  
about times and dates we  
do not need to write to you,  
for you know very well that  
the Day of the Lord will come  
like a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:1,2

to avoid:

**Deception:** Many will come making brilliant claims and promises and many will be deceived, but you have the Word of God to teach you in all truth.

**Discouragement:** Famine and other natural disasters have always been a part of world history so don't let this discourage you.

**Dismay:** Persecution and apostasy will come to those who identify with Christ but don't be dismayed.

But the sign that seems to most clearly guarantee the end of this old world and the ushering in of God's glorious kingdom is the very thing we are commanded to do:

**Diligence:** Preach the Gospel to all the nations. Be diligent in reaching others with the Gospel.

### Final Thoughts

There are those who are so caught up in pointing to the signs of His coming that they miss pointing to the Savior. They are so busy inviting others to witness His return that they miss inviting them to live in His redemption. It would seem that the sooner the Church accomplishes her task (Matthew 28:16-20), the less time people everywhere will need to endure the increasing wickedness of this world.

The end is not yet here, but Jesus has told us two things to do until He returns—occupy and watch. “...Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13b KJV). “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew 25:13). We are here for a purpose—to occupy, to busy ourselves in telling others about Jesus, and to watch for His return. “‘Surely I come quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20b KJV).

God help us to not just look for signs, but to make tracks... to bring the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ to all people everywhere... “and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14b).

### Spending Time With God

This four-week study series, “Signs of the Times,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

SIGNS OF THE TIMES | THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

LESSON 1

The Signs of the End of the Age | Matthew 24:1-14

### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. From the commentary and sermon, what impressed you the most about the Olivet Discourse? Why was it called the Olivet Discourse?

b. Do you think religious deception is at an all-time high today? Why or why not?

2. Notice in Matthew 24:3, the keen interest of the disciples in understanding the events and signs surrounding the end of time. Why do you think they were so interested?

4. Read Matthew 24:6-8.

a. Do any of the signs listed here seem especially relevant to this generation? Explain.

3. Read Matthew 24:4-5.

a. Have you ever heard of any individual who personally claimed to be the Messiah? Who?

b. What does the phrase “beginning of birth pains” suggest about what is to come?



SERIES

SIGNS OF THE TIMES | THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

LESSON 1

The Signs of the End of the Age | Matthew 24:1-14

### Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. If you could have a personal interview with Jesus today and could ask one question regarding prophecy and the end times, what would you ask? (Remember Matthew 24:36 reminds us that only the Father knows the exact day or hour.)

b. See Matthew 5:10-13 and 1 Peter 3:13-18. Is there any reason or reward tied to such persecution? Explain.

c. From Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21:12-19, what other promises are given to those who face such awful persecution?

6. Do you think we are living near the end of the age? Why or why not?

8. Read Matthew 24:10. What do you think Jesus meant when He described those who would “turn away from the faith”?

7. Read Matthew 24:9.

a. Read also John 15:18-20. Do you think Christians should expect to be persecuted? Why or why not?

Compare John 10:27-30 with Hebrews 6:4-9. Do you think a person can actually lose his/her salvation? Explain.



SERIES

SIGNS OF THE TIMES | THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

LESSON 1

The Signs of the End of the Age | Matthew 24:1-14

9. If you knew the promise of a new heaven and a new earth would be fulfilled in this decade (Revelation 21:1), would your lifestyle change? If so, how?

b. Ephesians 6:10-18

10. Read Matthew 24:14. Why do you think in God's economy the Gospel needs to be preached to all the nations before the "end will come?" (If possible support your answer with Scripture.)

c. Revelation 12:11

Take time to pray together that you will live each day with the Lord's return in mind.

### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Based on insights from Matthew 24:11-13 and the following Scriptures, how can believers who encounter the kind of difficulties described in these verses "stand firm to the end"?

a. Luke 6:46-49

#### Scripture for Meditation

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:14



In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33b

### Introduction

We don't like the idea of tribulation. No one likes suffering. Our very nature recoils at the thought. We can recall Peter's famous response to Christ's description of the suffering Messiah, "Never, Lord!" he said, "This shall never happen to you!" (Matthew 16:22b).

Why should God's own Son need to suffer? Looking back, we now understand that God the Father had a plan through which Christ's suffering would lead to blessing for all. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

In Matthew 24:15-25, Jesus described suffering that would fall on the Church. This time Peter did not protest. Maybe Peter realized the connection—since there was a purpose for Christ's sufferings, there would be a purpose for Christ's Church to suffer. Years later, Peter's letters to the Church would contain deep and wondrous insights to comfort the suffering Church (1 Peter 2:4; 2 Peter 2-3).

### Great Distress

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus warned, "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16).

The disciples would have recalled the prophecy recorded in Daniel 11:31-32, which had been fulfilled 200 years earlier by Antiochus Epiphanes (nicknamed "madman"). Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the Jewish Temple in 168 BC by erecting in it a statue of Zeus. He violated the Jewish laws, and he offered swine upon the sacred altar. All of this was an abomination to the Jew and the Lord God of Israel. Many Jews were killed because they refused to comply with his barbaric and revolting rules.

Yet Jesus was telling them that there was a desecration of the temple yet to come. Here lies a principle of prophetic interpretation that we cannot overlook—most Old Testament prophecies have both immediate and long-term fulfillment. The parallel account in Luke 21:5-28 shows that these trials would affect not only the Temple in Jerusalem, but also the whole city of Jerusalem. Jesus stated, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20). It was because of these warnings given by Christ that Jewish Christians, fearing a Roman crackdown on Jerusalem in AD 66, fled Jerusalem and hid in the wilderness. As a result, these believers escaped a Roman offensive against Jerusalem and an eventual six-month siege by Titus in AD 70. Titus showed no mercy in desecrating the Jews' sacred city.

Many Bible scholars believe the desecration of the temple described by Christ in the Olivet Discourse was a prophetic statement only partially fulfilled in AD 70. By comparing his statements with other Scriptures (e.g., Daniel 9:25-27; Revelation 13); it appears that our Lord was also referencing a greater tribulation to come. He described a "great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again" (Matthew 24:21). Perhaps, like the prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus here gave predictions that had both an immediate and a

And the God of all grace,  
who called you to His  
eternal glory in Christ,  
after you have suffered  
a little while, will Himself  
restore you and make you  
strong, firm and steadfast.

1 Peter 5:10

long-term fulfillment.

### Great Tribulation

So what is the Great Tribulation recorded in Revelation 7:13-14... “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation;...”?

In Daniel 9:27, it appears that sometime in the future, a covenant will be signed between Israel and a deceptive world leader who will take his stand against Christ and His Church. (John gives him the title Antichrist in 1 John 2:18.) This covenant or treaty will inaugurate a seven-year period. During the first half of this period, the Jews will rebuild the Temple. During the second half, the Antichrist will desecrate the Temple (Daniel 9:27).

For years, the idea of a treaty with Israel would have seemed ridiculous for there was no Israel. However in 1948, after centuries of dispersion, the Jews drew together, and Israel became a nation once again. Such a phenomenon is unparalleled in history. Then in 1967 in only six days at war, the Israelis once again inhabited the holy city, Jerusalem. Today the Jews long for the fulfillment of one of the final pieces of prophecy—the rebuilding of the Temple.

But what about this Antichrist, this world dictator? Who is he and what will he do during this horrendous “tribulation?” The notion of an antichrist has long been of interest to the Church. It has become an historically proven pastime to assign this title to various political and religious leaders. But the Antichrist described in the Bible will eventually be known by all. “And he performed great and miraculous signs...He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark...” (Revelation 13:13-17).

Those who accept this futuristic interpretation of prophecy generally believe that during the first three and one half years of the Great Tribulation this potentate will become a super hero. The following three and one half years, he will be a demonic villain. In the beginning, he will defend Israel. In the end, he will vehemently turn against her. He will defiantly enter the Holy of Holies declaring that he is in fact God and demand the people to worship him (Revelation 13:11-17). Those that do not bow the knee will suffer the most awful religious persecution the world has ever known. Thus the fitting title, the Great Tribulation.

### Great Patience

Great tribulation requires great patience—as does all suffering. Christians can grow through suffering. And hardships can cause unbelievers to examine their priorities. In the first chapter of 2 Peter, we are reminded that God inspires all prophecy. In the second chapter, Peter warns of increasing wickedness of this world. And in the third chapter, he tells of two of God's concerns surrounding the ultimate destruction of the world—judgment upon the wicked (2 Peter 3:7) and the salvation of every last possible person (2 Peter 3:9).

Perhaps God is allowing the world to run its evil course, so that even those steeped in rebellion

Bear in mind that our  
Lord's patience means  
salvation...

2 Peter 3:15a

will recognize the ultimate conclusion of selfishness and sin. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Just how close we are, no one knows for sure. Over 450 years ago, Martin Luther felt sure he was living in the last days because of the persecution and decline of the Church. In a true sense, we have been living in the last days since the first advent of Jesus. Every generation seems to think it is the worst. We have need for patience, now, and in the years to come.

### Final Thought

Before the communist takeover in China, Christians were encouraged to believe that they would not need to face suffering because Christ would take them home before the Great Tribulation. But when they suddenly faced a devastating, nationwide, religious crackdown, many of them were disillusioned and abandoned their faith. Kim Lawton, in an article, "Killed In The Line of Duty," revealed that over 40 million Christians have been killed in China since the Church began. Over 156,000 were martyred in 1995, including 52,000 women. Such tribulation is not only found in China, Lawton states, but also, "Throughout the world today—in Pakistan, Rwanda, Colombia, Iran and Peru—martyrs are paying the ultimate price for their faith."

"God is never so present in our lives as when we suffer in His name." — David Jeremiah

While we look forward to Christ's return, let us also be prepared for suffering. We are not exempt from tribulation and distress. Jesus promised that those who live for Him will be persecuted (John 15:20). But we have a hope and future in Christ that can never be taken away from us. And God promises to use it for good even in our suffering (1 Peter 1:6-7). Such perspective can enable us to be patient in our sufferings.

### Spending Time With God

This four-week study series, "Signs of the Times," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

SIGNS OF THE TIMES | THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

LESSON 2

Patience in Tribulation | Matthew 24:15-25

### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. What insight from the commentary is a challenge or blessing for you?

3. What encouragement do the following Scriptures assure the believer when facing adversity?

a. Joshua 1:9

2. Matthew 24:15-25 presents a scenario of oppression and suffering for those who love God. From the following passages in 1 Peter, give some possible reasons that Christians suffer.

b. 2 Corinthians 12:9

a. 1 Peter 1:6-7

c. Hebrews 13:6

b. 1 Peter 2:21-25

### Discussion (Small Group Study)

c. 1 Peter 3:13-17

4. In Matthew 24:15-25, Christ foretold the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred in AD 70. Many believe He was also predicting a horrific time of suffering for all the people of God at the end of time. Based on your understanding of Scripture, what is your opinion about whether we will soon face a Great Tribulation?

d. 1 Peter 4:1-2



5. In John 15:18-27, Jesus prepared His disciples for suffering and persecution. Which verses or thoughts from this text are especially helpful to you? Why?

8. In Matthew 24:23-24, Jesus warned about false messiahs. Who are some of the false Christs in the world today?

How can we positively identify the real Messiah when He comes (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17)?

6. Looking at Church History, what were some times of great tribulation and the names of some persecutors of the faith, who may have been considered the Antichrist in their time?

9. Do you think Christians today focus too much on end-time prophecy? Not enough? What about you personally? Do you wish you knew more about this topic or not? Explain.

7. It may seem unfair that good people should suffer. How does Peter address that issue in 1 Peter 4:17-19?

Take time to pray together for God's grace to face trials in your life.



SERIES

SIGNS OF THE TIMES | THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

LESSON 2

Patience in Tribulation | Matthew 24:15-25

### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

10. Read Revelation 16 and describe the seven bowls of God's wrath that will be poured out on the earth (Many teach these are part of the Great Tribulation for the end of the world).

12. What is the biggest question you have concerning prophecy that you would like to explore in the days ahead?

11. Why would God initiate such awful suffering on earth?

How does Revelation 21-22 bring balance to the equation?

#### Scripture for Meditation

At that time if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "There He is!" do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See I have told you ahead of time.

Matthew 24:23-25



He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.

Isaiah 53:2b

### Introduction

Warren Wiersbe states, “The purpose of prophecy is not to entertain the curious, but to encourage the consecrated.”

Nothing in Scripture is more controversial than the interpretation of prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled. Many of these controversies involve the sequence of end-times events. Most opinions can be grouped into three categories:

- Pre-millennial (*millennium*, a Latin word meaning “1,000 years”). Pre-millennialists argue that Jesus will return first and then establish a 1,000 year reign on earth.
- Post-millennial. Post-millennialists reason that Jesus will return after a 1,000-year Christian millennium.
- Amillennial. Amillennialists believe that there will be no literal millennium—Jesus’ return will be The Day of the Lord, or The Day of Judgment.

### The First Coming

The Old Testament contains over 300 prophecies about Jesus’ first coming; yet the majority of the world missed it. These prophecies about His first coming did not become fully clear to His people until His incarnation as a babe in a manger and as a suffering servant (1 Peter 1:10-12).

In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus gave strong admonitions to His disciples not to be like the Pharisees who could discern the weather but failed to see the signs of the time. When He comes the second time, He will come, “...on the clouds of the sky, with POWER and great GLORY” (Matthew 24:30—emphasis added).

Stephen Brown, noted author and Bible teacher, relates the following story comparing Jesus’ first and second coming.

Brown took his German Shepherd to the veterinarian for his yearly vaccinations. As the dog lay docile and quiet on the examining table, the vet proceeded to give him the first injection. The dog winced from the pain but didn’t retaliate. However, as the vet turned to get another syringe to administer a second shot, the dog was standing on all fours, teeth bared, and ready to attack. This German Shepherd was meek and mild for the first injection but took a new approach the second time around.

For His first advent, Jesus came as a lamb, meek and mild. He was ridiculed, mocked, laughed at, beaten beyond recognition, deserted by friends, betrayed by one friend and denied by another, maligned, falsely accused, spit upon, and nailed to a cruel Roman cross. However, at His second coming, He will come as the Lion of Judah and conquering King. THE KING OF KINGS! Like Stephen Brown’s German Shepherd—things will be different the second time around!

### The Second Coming

Scripture is clear—Jesus’ Second Coming will be clear and obvious to everyone. “For as lightning

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

Matthew 24:30b

that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:27). Christians may, in good faith, interpret Matthew 24:26-44 and similar passages in different ways. There is one key point upon which all agree however—Jesus will return!

Jesus warned against following false Christs. The world has been plagued with such persons since before His first advent, and there are many still around today. In verse 28, Jesus says, “Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.” This was apparently a well-known proverb at the time. The meaning is not entirely clear, but several possibilities are suggested. Among the more credible ideas is the one that states that the signs of His coming will be as obvious as that of vultures gathering around a corpse. Many Bible commentators simply pass over this verse. (We will have to ask Him what He meant when we see Him.)

In the ensuing verses, Jesus painted a vivid portrait of His return. His Jewish listeners, probably familiar with such Old Testament prophecies as Isaiah 13:6-13, Amos 5:18-20, and Ezekiel 32:7 recognized this to be “The Day of the Lord”: “But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (2 Peter 3:10). One thing is certain, this will be a terrible time! People will attempt to flee or to hide (Isaiah 2:19-21), and many will refuse to repent (Revelation 9:20).

Christians, however, should not fear for “...he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matthew 24:31). This verse seems to refer not only to those still on the earth on that day, but to all the elect, including those already in heaven.

### Signs and Season

Jesus gives three practical illustrations in Matthew 24:32-41:

- The budding fig tree shows that we can recognize the evidences of His Second Coming, although we will not know the exact day or hour (Matthew 24:32-35).
- “As in the days of Noah.” The world’s majority will not heed the warnings of Scripture and will become more and more wicked until the final day (Matthew 24:36-39).
- Men and women will be working as usual, and one will be taken and one will be left (Matthew 24:40-41). Life will appear quite routine, but Jesus will appear and take all who have put their faith and trust in Him. Those who have not will be left behind.

When these signs (in the heavens) are seen, the time will be very close, “...right at the door” (Matthew 24:33). Jesus adds, “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until these things have happened” (Matthew 24:34). There are two possibilities for the meaning of the word generation. Jesus may be referring to the Jewish race in general, or to the generation of people who are living when these signs appear.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18

### Our Hope

Jesus also reminds us of the hope we have in Him. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24: 35). What an awesome word: hope! In the Bible, hope does not mean simply “to wish for.” The American Heritage Dictionary defines hope as “a desire that is accompanied by some confident expectation.” Biblical hope arises from an absolute confidence that His Word is true. Where, then, do we place our hope? Not in the heavens above us, not in the things of this earth, not in the Church or its leaders. All these things will pass away. Our hope is in the authority of His Word which will never pass away.

The passage concludes with several verses that teach us that we cannot know when all this will take place and reminds us that it will be sudden (see also Acts 1:7). People will still be engaged in their worldly pursuits—“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:37). As men ignored Noah’s warnings, so they will continue to ignore this and other warnings found in Scripture.

### Final Thought

The thirteenth century was a time much like our own. Europe was emerging from the feudal period, and the great nations were beginning to be formed. Wars were rampant, and natural disasters were occurring at an unprecedented rate. The Church was corrupt and apostate. Superstition abounded, and the Black Plague was beginning to decimate the population. It seemed as if all Biblical prophecy had been fulfilled. But the end did not come.

Something significant, however, was happening. God had set in motion the series of events that led to the Protestant Reformation. He may be doing something equally significant in the world and in His Church today, or something even greater—He may be about to return! But we must be careful not to interpret the Bible solely on the basis of the latest headlines. Our main focus should be on Christ and what He desires to do in us and through us today. Christ did not exhort us to try to understand when in the future He might come but to be prepared for His coming today! God alone knows the day and the hour. Let us watch expectantly and wait prayerfully. Today might be the day!

### Spending Time With God

This four-week study series, “Signs of the Times,” is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



SERIES

SIGNS OF THE TIMES | THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

LESSON 3

Watch and Wait | Matthew 24:26-41

### Devotion (Personal Study)

1. What thought from the commentary especially challenged or encouraged you?

2. Please read Matthew 24:26-27. Imagine a blaze of forked lightning, piercing the sky, and illuminating the landscape as far as the eye can see. What does this Biblical imagery tell us about the Second Coming of Christ?

3. See Matthew 24:30 regarding Christ's Second Coming:

a. The word *nations* often represents all of the nations outside of Israel—the Gentiles. Why do you think the nations will mourn when they see Christ coming in the clouds?

b. Read Zechariah 12:10-11. Many Biblical scholars think this reference describes the response of the Jewish people to Christ when He comes again. List the words describing the attitude of the Jews in these verses.

Why do you think the Jews responded thus to the coming of Christ?

c. What would your response be if Christ appeared right now? Explain.

### Discussion (Small Group Study)

4. Read Matthew 24:32-34. The fig tree is often used as a symbol of the nation of Israel in Scripture. Do you think that is the case here? If so, what is the significance as you see it?



5. See Matthew 24:38-39. Compare it with Genesis 6:5-8 and 2 Peter 2:5. When Christ says, “As it was in the days of Noah,” do you think He was referring to the wickedness of the people on earth, the judgment to come, the surprise of His coming... or what?

(Think about the account of Noah.) How does this apply to us today?

6. Do you think today is like “the days of Noah?” Why or why not?

8. Read Matthew 24:40-41. Do you think believers should long for the Rapture—the experience of being caught up into the air to meet Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)—or should we just simply trust in Him for salvation? Explain.

7. Matthew 24:39 reads, “They knew nothing about what would happen...” Do you think this is because they were not warned?

9. Complete this thought: “If Christians were suddenly caught up to meet the Lord, the persons who might be left behind that concern me most are...”



Take time to pray for those close to you who do not yet trust Christ for salvation.

### **Digging Deeper (Further Study)**

10. Read Luke 12:16-20 and James 4:13-17. Describe how these verses apply in preparing for the Lord's return.

11. The next section of the Olivet Discourse begins with "Therefore keep watch..." (Matthew 24:42). Explain what it means to you to "keep watch..."

#### **Scripture for Meditation**

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will never pass away.

Matthew 24:35



...while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13

### Introduction

A study of prophecies regarding the future is of no help to us if it does not affect the way we live our lives today. Although we look forward to God's kingdom being made visible and completely established, we should remember that this kingdom is in our midst now.

“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21). Therefore, we should be careful to live faithfully for God—right until the end.

There is a fable that tells of three of Satan's demons who were scouring the earth to tempt and deceive men. The first demon said, “I'll tell them there is no God.” Satan replied, “That's no good. Some will still believe.” The second demon said, “I'll tell them there's no hell.” Satan answered, “That won't work either. Many use that word every day; therefore, I guess they believe in it.” “I know what will work,” said the third demon. “I'll tell them there's no hurry.” Satan gleefully smiled and replied, “GO! They always believe they have more time.”

### Be Watchful

Jesus had just finished explaining that in the final harvest there will be two groups of people on the earth, those who are living their lives by faith in Jesus Christ and those who are not. The first group will be gathered by the angels for eternal blessedness and the remaining group will be swept away in judgment just like the people in the days of Noah. He warns us to keep watch lest the day of His coming becomes a great disappointment for us (Matthew 24:36-41).

Perhaps Jesus means that we should watch for the signs which He mentioned earlier so that we will not forget that He is coming again in power and glory (Matthew 24:1-51). But He may also be warning us to watch ourselves lest we fall into temptation as we await His coming. He later rebuked His disciple Peter in this manner, when He found the disciples sleeping after telling them to keep watch.

“Then He returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ He said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Mark 14:37-38).

Jesus tells us to keep watch because He is coming like a thief in the night. A thief is quiet and quick. He usually strikes at night under the shroud of darkness. What a strange analogy for our Righteous Savior to apply to Himself. However, if a homeowner prepares in advance, then he is alert and waiting for the intruder. Jesus wants us to understand that His coming will be both unexpected and forceful, and we are to be ready.

An exploration by Sr. Ernest Shackleton in 1914 illustrates our need to always be alert and ready. Shackleton was on his third expedition to the Antarctica with a crew of 27 men. They encountered many hardships as their vessel became frozen in the icy waters and was crushed by an ice pack. Shackleton and his crew walked across the ice floes for five months before reaching Elephant Island. At that time, Shackleton and five of his men set off in a small boat to seek help

Therefore keep watch,  
because you do not know  
on what day your Lord  
will come.

Matthew 24:42

for the remaining crew. One can only imagine how those left behind must have felt.

After one of the most courageous polar explorations in history, Shackleton returned on August 30, 1916, for his men. He found them watching and waiting for his return. Shackleton said to his men, “It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go.” They replied, “We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, ‘The boss may come today.’”

### **Be Faithful**

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant,” Jesus asks (Matthew 24:45). He is one whom the Master will find doing what is required of him when the Master returns (Matthew 24:46). For that servant, Jesus’ coming will be a cause for celebration—for God will then put the servant “in charge of all his possessions” (Matthew 24:47).

When a master had to be away for any length of time, it was not unusual for him to put a trustworthy servant in charge of his household affairs. Hopefully, this would be someone who would conduct business in accordance to the character and quality of his master. Jesus said the honorable servant shows himself faithful in the way he treats his fellow servants. His master has put him in charge of giving them their sustenance at the proper time.

A faithful servant of Jesus Christ is one who loves those whom Jesus loves. He shows this love by tenderly seeing to their care and making it his concern that their needs for nourishment are met. This must include attending to the physical needs of those around us, as well as feeding them with the life-giving spiritual food of the Gospel. “It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns” (Matthew 24:46).

Jesus, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), expects us to follow His example and lay our lives down for each other (John 15:12-13). We are to follow our Lord’s example not only by our words but also by our deeds. “Jesus said, ‘Take care of My sheep’” (John 21:16c).

Is there someone you know who needs spiritual food? Perhaps Jesus is tarrying just a little longer in order that you might share the “Bread of Life” with them.

### **Be Warned**

But what about the servant whom his master finds living with no regard for his master’s will? Jesus said, “He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:51). For the unfaithful servant, the coming of our Lord will be despairing and dreadful.

The wicked servant is the one who takes no interest in others’ welfare. He further shows his hypocrisy by mistreating his fellow servants and indulging himself on selfish and ungodly pleasures. Such a person has no share in God’s kingdom, for his heart is basically opposed to the kingdom values of love, faithfulness, and compassion.

Perhaps this may seem harsh to some, but let us never forget the penalty for sin is death and

The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9

separation from God (Romans 6:23). We know God is love, but we also know He is holy and just and will never compromise His holiness for sin. So what are we to do? Praise God, it was done on the cross 2,000 years ago when Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice that we might be put right with God. Those who put their trust in Jesus Christ share in His righteousness and will never experience God's condemnation (Romans 8:1).

### Final Thought

"Son," a mom said anxiously, "Why don't you come down for dinner?" The ten-year-old responded with excitement, "Because I'm studying for the spelling test next Friday. The winner gets a big prize." His mom smiled and said, "But that's a week away. Dinner is now." "Spelling is now, too, mom," he replied. "I've got to learn now to be ready for then."

If we are looking forward to the culmination of God's kingdom, should we not also be eager to live according to the kingdom's values now? Just as we desire Jesus to come in power and establish righteousness on the earth, let us welcome His kingdom in our midst right now. We establish His kingdom by taking Him as our King and expressing the righteousness and love He has put in our hearts.

Be watchful! Be faithful! Be wise! Be warned! Today could be the day when Jesus returns! What will you be doing? Where will you be? More importantly—are you ready?

"We are to be ready for the last moment by being ready at every moment" — Bonar.

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

### Spending Time With God

This four-week study series, "Signs of the Times," is designed to supplement your personal and small group Bible study. The devotion questions are written for your personal study. The discussion questions are especially for small groups. Members who answer the questions ahead of time can bring more insight into their small group meeting. The digging deeper questions are for those who wish for more personal or small group study. As you spend time with God, may His Word enrich your life and enhance your daily walk with Him. Pray, asking God for special insight into His Word.



**Devotion (Personal Study)**

1. What thought or insight from the commentary especially blessed or challenged you?

b. How does Paul recommend that we stay “awake” and ready for the Lord’s return (1 Thessalonians 5:6-11)?

2. Read Matthew 24:42.

a. Why do you think the Lord did not specify the exact time at which He would return?

4. Read Mark 14:32-38.

a. Why did Jesus warn Peter to “watch and pray” (Mark 14:38)?

b. Complete this thought: “I could better keep watch for the Lord’s coming by.... “

b. What significance does Jesus’ rebuke to Peter have for us?

3. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

a. Why is the coming of Jesus not like a thief for us who believe in Him (Thessalonians 5:4)?



### Discussion (Small Group Study)

5. Read Matthew 24:45-47. Jesus asks who the faithful and wise servant is whom the Master has put in charge of the servants in His household. Does this refer to you? If so, do you take it seriously? (See also Luke 12:41-48, where Peter wrestled with similar questions.)

6. From Matthew 24:45-51, do you think the Lord's language regarding the punishment of the unfaithful servant is too strong? Explain.

7. Matthew 25 contains three parables which are also part of the Olivet Discourse and flow logically from the parable of the faithful servant (Matthew 24:45-51). What do you think is the main point of the first parable in chapter 25, that of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)?

What might the oil in the lamps represent?

8. Read parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). What might the talents represent? Based on this parable, what should you do to prepare for the Lord's return?

9. Read the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46). What is the main point of this text?



Based on this parable, what should you do to prepare for the Lord's return?

12. Read the ending of the Bible (Revelation 22). What additional insights do you find here about preparing for the Lord's imminent return?

10. Complete this thought: "The greatest challenge I have received from this study of the Olivet Discourse is..."

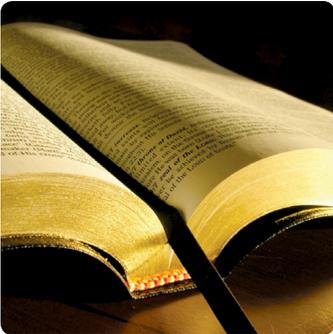
### Digging Deeper (Further Study)

11. Compare Matthew's version of the Olivet Discourse with that found in Mark 13 and Luke 21. Find and record at least one new insight or perspective that you draw from these other texts.

#### Scripture for Meditation

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Matthew 24:42



## BNEXT Small Group Leader's Guide

This BNEXT Leader's Guide is for facilitator/leaders. Please read this information before you begin. As the facilitator of a small group, you will have the experience of not only sharing this journey through God's Word with others but of aiding them along the way. You do not need previous experience or special training to lead a group. (Your primary responsibility is to serve as facilitator, not to teach.)

### MATERIALS NEEDED FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

- Either the electronic version or a printed copy for each participant. (The electronic version of this BNEXT Study can be printed. When printed, the blue boxes that were visible in the electronic version will print as blank spaces for participants to record their answers.)
- Bible for each participant, preferably the same version (these studies use the NIV)
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- Watch or clock to monitor time

### ABOUT THIS STUDY

This BNEXT study series is versatile and may be used by individuals, small groups, or even entire congregations. The use of a small group as part of the program will enhance each one's experience. BNEXT studies have successfully been used in a variety of environments, including home groups, churches, prisons, and businesses.

These lessons are designed for the individual to read the Scripture passages, read the three pages of commentary, and answer the questions throughout the week. The participants then attend a weekly meeting with the small group to share insights and discuss the material. Total time for each weekly lesson should be about 1 to 1½ hours in length. Suggested lesson plans with timing guidelines are found at the end of this Guide.

If you use this study in a large group or an entire church, there are two possible approaches. One approach is for the entire group to first gather for a welcome and opening prayer, after which participants can meet in small groups for discussion using the BNEXT questions. After a specified amount of time, all would reconvene into a larger setting to present highlights from each group, and for closing words of encouragement and prayer. The other approach is to begin together as a larger group for a welcome and then split into smaller groups for the remainder of the time/lesson.

## ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

**Group Size:** Experience has shown that a group size of 10–12 people works best. If your group is significantly larger, we suggest that you create additional small groups.

**Group Leaders:** Each group should have its own facilitator/leader. It is good to also have at least one back-up facilitator in case the primary facilitator is absent. If you have several groups meeting at one time, decide who will be responsible for facilitating the larger group gatherings for the welcome time and so forth.

## ABOUT FACILITATOR/LEADERS

These lessons are designed to easily be used by a first-time leader as well as an experienced leader. The ideal small group facilitator/leader should have:

- a hunger for God's Word and a deep desire to see others grow in their knowledge of God and His Word,
- a commitment to the group, emphasizing seeing the program through to the end,
- the ability to facilitate and moderate discussion rather than teach, and
- a willingness to follow the "Discussion Group Rules of Engagement" (found in this Leader's Guide).

As facilitator, pray for your small group. Spend time preparing your own lesson (you should attempt to answer all of the questions before the class) and be thinking about how to present the questions to the group. Group members should be encouraged to at least answer the first two sets of questions — Devotion (Personal Study) and Discussion (Small Group Study) questions — before each class, to enhance their learning experience. Even better, encourage them to find time to complete Digging Deeper (Further Study) questions on their own. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage participants to develop the habit of delving into Scripture and studying on a regular basis.

You are not expected to be a Biblical expert. You are a facil-

itator, so resist the attempt to teach. You are there to guide the group, keep them on track, and avoid getting caught up in doctrinal debates. If you want to facilitate the group with a broadened background knowledge, see our "Background Study Option" below.

Recognize that not everyone is comfortable answering questions. Gently keep discussion going by asking questions like, "Does anyone else have something to add?" It can be helpful at times to have a volunteer read Scripture texts that are referred to in the questions.

Recognize and affirm all who contribute to the discussion. Do not dismiss someone's answer as wrong. If an answer is obviously off-base, thank them for their answer, then ask what others think. Remind the group to let Scripture interpret Scripture.

If you feel that a certain statement or question is inappropriate for your group, you may omit it or at least recognize that not everyone needs to answer it. However, do not be afraid of letting the group tackle tough topics.

## BACKGROUND STUDY OPTIONS

Again, facilitators are not expected to be Biblical experts. If the group looks to you for an answer you do not have, it is perfectly fine to say, "I'm not sure. Perhaps we can all think about that one and bring it up again next week?" Or, "Let's bring this one up to the larger group when there is time allotted for such discussion." Or, "Let's see if this doesn't answer itself over the weeks as we continue our study. Remember, the Bible interprets itself."

For extra study, you may wish to approach your pastor or to read commentaries and use other resources. The internet contains a wealth of information ... and also disinformation. Some internet sites that provide reliable (and free) commentaries and articles include: [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), and [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org).

Another useful source of general Biblical knowledge is *The Essential Bible Companion*, by the same contributors of our *Bible*

in 90 Days study series: John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).

## LEADING THE CLASS (Suggested Lesson Plans)

### First Class

Decide where you want to meet weekly and decide on a time. Once this has been done, actively publicize the *BNEXT* study throughout all your circles — at your church, workplace, friends, family, etc. There are some free publicity aids on our website at [ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/](http://ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/freebies/). (If the study is being done by the entire congregation, recruit facilitators for each group and have one facilitator designated to lead the closing session when all come back together.)

Be sure that every participant has downloaded the electronic version or has a printed copy of the study at least one week prior to the first small group meeting. Have everyone complete the first lesson's reading and answer the questions in preparation for the first gathering of the group(s).

The first class is unique in that a little more time is spent on introductions and explanations of how the classes will function.

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of members (13 minutes)
 

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

  - a. Think of something brief each participant could say about themselves such as: "Tell us something unique about yourself." Or perhaps, "What do you hope to get out of this BNEXT study?"
  - b. Remind them to keep their answers brief (one minute or less).
2. Give an overview of the class and expectations (7 minutes)
  - a. Inform the class of how many weeks it will take to cover the study and the date of the last class.
  - b. Discuss the format of the BNEXT study and ask if

there are any questions.

- c. Review the "Rules of Engagement" which are located at the end of this Leader's Guide.
3. Discuss lesson questions (35 minutes)
    - a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that anyone would like to discuss with the group.
    - b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are provided to promote dialogue and conversation.
    - c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.
 

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes to allow for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share a highlight of their small group discussion.)
  4. Closing prayer (5 minutes)
    - a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
    - b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.
  5. If you are providing printed copies of lessons to participants, distribute the lesson for next week
  6. Dismissal

### Subsequent Classes

1. Opening prayer, welcome, and introduction of any new participants (10 minutes)

(NOTE: Entire church groups meet together for opening prayer only and then break into their small groups.)

- a. If there are new members, have them introduce themselves. Remind them to be brief (one minute or less).
- b. Think of a good ice-breaker that somehow relates to the study. For example, if you are studying "The Ten

Commandments – Exodus 20,” you may ask, “Why do you think Exodus or the Ten Commandments are important?” Or, “How do the Ten Commandments relate to the cross of Jesus Christ?” Remind them to keep their answers short. Set a time limit for this opening section; not everyone needs to answer.

- c. If you think it's necessary, remind the group of the “Rules of Engagement” at the end of this Guide.

## 2. Discuss lesson questions (45 minutes)

- a. Ask if there are any Devotion questions that people in the group would like to discuss.
- b. Give primary attention to the Discussion questions, which are designed to promote dialogue and conversation.
- c. If time permits, you may wish to use one or more of the Digging Deeper questions.

(NOTE: For an entire church, allow an extra 10-15 minutes for the groups to come back together at a specified time. Allow each group to share an insight of their small group discussion.)

## 3. Closing prayer (5 minutes)

- a. If time is short, then as the leader, pray for the group.
- b. If you have more time, you may ask if there are any prayer requests and either pray on behalf of the group or open it up for the group to pray.

## 5. Dismissal

### SMALL GROUP RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

It is important to treat one another in Christian love. These “Rules of Engagement” will be helpful, so read them aloud during the first class; thereafter, refer to them as needed by the group.

1. Begin each reading/study session with prayer, expecting God to speak to you through His Word.

2. Come prepared for each week's session by completing the reading and the study questions.
3. Your small group will have a facilitator. Please be respectful of the facilitator's leadership.
4. The facilitator's responsibility is to guide or shepherd the discussions. Do not expect your facilitator to be an expert on Scripture — each group member should seek the answers from Scripture on his/her own.
5. Each group member is invited to join the discussion but should not feel required to do so. If called upon, it is okay to say, “Thank you, but I would prefer to pass on answering that question.”
6. Alternatively, do not dominate a discussion. Time is limited, so please be sensitive to everyone in the group to help ensure that each person has the opportunity to participate.
7. Respect everyone's answers and views on Scripture. However, let Scripture interpret Scripture and expect the Holy Spirit to speak/teach through His written Word.
8. In preparation for each lesson, you are not expected to do extra study or research. If you wish to dig deeper, then here are a few helpful resources:
  - Go to [ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/](http://ScriptureAwakening.com/bnext/) for key tips and guidelines for best use of BNEXT study series in your small group or whole church.
  - The internet contains a wealth of information (and sometimes disinformation). Some useful Bible study sites include: [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com), [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), and [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org).
  - *The Essential Bible Study Companion* (hard copy), by John Walton, Mark Strauss, and Ted Cooper Jr., Zondervan Publishing (also available as an e-book).