

Staying Awake



What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!' Mark 13:37

The last days.

When you look at an overview of biblical history, it can be separated into three periods that last for roughly two thousand years each. If you consider each of these periods as “days” then the first days would consist of the fall, the flood, and the tower of Babel. The middle days would include the call of Abraham, the old covenant, and the ministry of Jesus. The last days would encompass the new covenant and the return of Jesus. Whether God intended for history to be delineated in this way or not, I don’t know, but it’s an interesting observation. Regardless, Peter makes it clear by quoting Joel that the new covenant was the beginning of the last days.

And it shall come to pass **in the last days**, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, **before the great and notable day of the Lord come**: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.
Acts 2:17-21

The day of the Lord has not come yet so we know that we are still in the last days. Jesus gave us a broad overview of what would take place during the last days.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. Matthew 24:14

The preaching of the gospel to all the nations would fulfill the promise that God made to Abraham that in him all the nations would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). It is what is referred to as the time of the nations or time of the Gentiles. After that would be accomplished, then events would start to take place that would bring about the end of Satan’s kingdom and the beginning of Christ’s millennial reign.

That overview is reiterated in the book of Revelation, although in much more detail. In Revelation 1:19 Jesus instructs John to write the things which are, and the things which will be afterwards. John then writes the seven letters to the seven Gentile churches which represents the span of time when the gospel is being preached around the world. He then writes about the opening of the seven seals which ultimately brings about the end of Satan’s kingdom. That summary view matches the one stated in Matthew above.

Nearing the end of the last days.

There is reason to believe that we are nearing the end of the last days. Jesus gave us a clear sign to look for that would indicate that the gospel had been preached around the world.

And Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Luke 21:24b

Jerusalem is no longer being trampled underfoot by Gentiles so we know that the gospel has been preached to all the nations. This means that we are in the time of the end when global events will eventually lead to the rise of the man of sin and the return of Jesus.

The term “times of the Gentiles” should not be confused with the term “fullness of the Gentiles.” The difference between the two is the same as the difference between sowing and reaping. The times of the Gentiles is when the seed of the gospel is being sown around the world in all the nations. After that, there is a time when the crop grows and produces fruit. The fullness of the gentiles is when the fruit has reached maturity and the crop is harvested (Mark 4:26-29).

The seed of the gospel has been sown in every nation and we are currently in the process of being brought to maturity. It is during this time, as we look for the return of Jesus, that we are exhorted to stay awake.

Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, "Be on the alert!"
Mark 13:35-37

The theme of being alert and staying awake is repeated numerous times and in different ways which indicates that there is something about the return of Jesus that warrants such an emphasis, but what might that be? And what does it mean to stay awake?

The signs of the times.

In Matthew 24 Jesus describes the signs that are associated with His return. The characteristic that He mentions most often is deception. In fact, Jesus starts off His description of those days with the warning to see to it that we aren't misled.

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many. Matthew 24:4-5

Deceiving the human race and causing disobedience through lies and half-truths began in the Garden of Eden. It's nothing new, however, the fact that Jesus mentions it specifically as something to guard against suggests that it will be unusually prevalent before His return. Deception will be so prevalent, in fact, that it will even be propagated by some of those who acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ and who come in His name, as the above passage states.

Because of this, it's imperative that everyone understands the truth of God's word for themselves as revealed by the Holy Spirit and not rely solely on the teachings of men. The things that we believe to be true, whether they are true or not, will ultimately affect our behavior one way or another. If we are going to stay awake, we need to filter out and reject those things that are presented as truth but are not.

Deception leads to sin.

As was the case in the Garden of Eden, lies led to deception which led to sin. The same still holds true today.

Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 6:9b-10

It's interesting that Paul prefaces the above statement with "do not be deceived." Since our fallen nature is drawn to the things of this world, false teachings have a subtle way of deceiving us into rationalizing sinful behavior as being acceptable. Regardless of how compelling the rationale might be, any teaching that normalizes any of the above-mentioned behaviors is a deception and should be rejected. This is why knowing God's word is so important. It is the unchanging standard against which all purported truth is measured.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:3-4

In the last days, many people will give preference to their own desires over the truth and thereby allow themselves to be deceived. Paul also mentions in 2 Timothy 3 that these people are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" and that they hold to a form of godliness but have denied its power. They find teachers who tell them what they want to hear which is in keeping with what Jesus taught about the deception of the end times where people would come in His name yet deceive many.

"Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap." Luke 21:34

For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. 1 Thessalonians 5:7

In a spiritual sense, falling asleep is a metaphor for engaging in the unfruitful works of darkness. Those who become deceived and engage in sinful activity will be in for a rude awakening.

Staying awake.

While it's necessary that we have a knowledge of the truth as a countermeasure to being deceived, such knowledge is useless unless it is acted upon. This is the message of the parable that Jesus taught in Matthew 7:24-27. The difference between the wise builder and the foolish builder is that the wise one acted on the teachings of Jesus while the foolish one ignored them. James 1:22 states that we deceive ourselves if we fail to act on what we know of the word of God

But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Hebrews 5:14

Practicing truth is how our spiritual senses are trained to keep us from being deceived. A lifestyle of obedience to the truth is our spiritual worship of God, and it has just as much to do with engaging in godly behavior as it does with abstaining from what is ungodly. Our ability to stay awake as the darkness of deception increases will be directly related to our involvement in knowing and doing the will of God.

Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. Matthew 24:12-13

Closely related to the exhortation of staying awake is the need to endure. The increase in sin that Jesus mentions in this passage is a consequence of the prevalence of lies and deception. This is why Hebrews 10:24-25 states that we are to encourage one another to love and good works, and all the more as we see the day approaching. Deception will continue to abound and lead to an increase in

sinful behavior and conflict with others as described in 2 Timothy 3:1-4. As believers, we are to persevere in keeping the commandments of God and holding to the testimony of Jesus until the end.

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2

Knowing and doing the will of God is not something that is unique to the end times. It is what all believers of all time are called to do as servants in the kingdom of God. What is unique about those days is the prevalence of satanic activity. We have been forewarned and it's up to us to stay awake by remaining vigilant and persevering in godly behavior until the end.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3

The seed of the gospel has been sown around the world and the crop is in the process of being brought to maturity. As the darkness of deception increases, may we all stay awake by walking in the light of truth and encourage others to do the same as well.

Truth to live by.

- We are to love God first and foremost (Matthew 22:36-38) and worship and serve only Him (Matthew 4:10). We do this by seeking to know **and do** His will (James 1:22). That is how we worship God in spirit and truth (Romans 12:1-2).
- Jesus is the only way of salvation. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). There is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).
- We are to set our affections on things above (Matthew 6:19-21, Colossians 3:1-2). This world, and its lusts, are going to pass away but those who do God's will are those who live forever (1 John 2:15-17).
- Sin is not to have a place in our lives (Romans 6:12). It hinders our worship of God and needs to be repented of (Hebrews 12:1, 1 Corinthians 15:33-34). Forgiveness comes through repentance (Acts 3:19).