

## GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

1. Help the group members to believe that Jesus Christ is going to return, not as the humble Son of Man, but as the almighty King of kings in order to save his people completely and to judge his enemies.
2. They must therefore understand how they must live in this present world.

## I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

### 1. Prayer

*Pray* that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

### 2. Meditation

Worship is to complete his God-given task.

**Theme: Dedication to Jesus Christ to be a finisher**

*Read* the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

#### ➤ *The beginning.*

When Jesus began his ministry on earth, he said:

**John 4:34**

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

#### ➤ *The end.*

When Jesus ended his ministry on earth, he said:

**John 17:4**

I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

Jesus Christ was a Finisher!

#### ➤ *The present.*

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews said:

**Hebrews 12:2**

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer (author) and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

And Paul wrote:

**Colossians 4:17**

Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.”

and:

**2 Timothy 4:7**

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

We Christians ought to become finishers just as Jesus Christ was a Finisher. Be a finisher!

### 3. Worship

*Let* everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences) by dedicating himself to Jesus Christ to become a finisher.

## II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

**The theme for this meeting is: The second coming of Jesus Christ**

*Read or explain in your own words.*

Just as Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, he will return (Acts 1:11). Then he will not return to this present earth as the humble Son of Man, but as the almighty God and King over the whole universe. He will come to complete the salvation of his people and the judgment of his enemies at the same time. The second coming of Jesus Christ is at the same time a coming to save and a coming to judge.

## III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

*Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.*

**Theme: The second coming of Jesus Christ**

Day 1<sup>BS</sup> Matthew 24:1-14

The first sign before the second coming (the long period of proclamation)

Day 2<sup>BS</sup> Matthew 24:15-28

The second sign before the second coming (the short period of tribulation)

Day 3<sup>BS</sup> Matthew 24:29-41

The third sign is the second coming of Jesus Christ himself

Day 4 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The apostasy of unbelievers and the last antichrist before the second coming

Day 5 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:4

The Day of the second coming

Day 6 2 Peter 3:1-14

The second coming, the last judgment and the renewal of all things

- Day 7 Matthew 25:31-46  
The last judgment
- Day 8 Revelation 14:6-13  
Announcement of the last judgment
- Day 9 Revelation 20:1-15  
The thousand year period, the final battle and the last judgment
- Day 10 Revelation 21:1 – 22:5  
The new heaven and the new earth

#### IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.  
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

##### 1. Discussing the study

*Discuss* the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

##### Theme: The second coming of Jesus Christ

- What are the important events in the long period between the first and second coming of Christ?
- What is the function of the signs in this period?
- What are the main events in the short period just before the second coming of Christ?
- What are the events at the second coming of Christ?
- How should Christians live before the second coming of Christ?

##### 2. Commitment

*Let the group members* consider the following questions and record their answers:

- “Either I will return to Christ before his second coming when I die, or I will return to him at his second coming. Whatever the case may be, I will see Jesus Christ soon! Therefore how should I live now?”
- “If Jesus Christ would come tomorrow, what would you do today?” Commit yourself to expect his second coming and to live a meaningful life every day.

##### 3. Personal sharing

*Discuss* personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

#### V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

##### 1. Review of previous Bible verses

*Let* pairs of group members review each other’s previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

##### 2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

*Explain* the meaning of the new Bible verse.

#### THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST 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

**Matthew 24:14** (NIV)

#### VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

##### Theme: The second coming of Jesus Christ

##### 1. Bible Study

*Make use of the 5 step method and study:*

##### Matthew 24:1-44

<sup>1</sup> Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. <sup>2</sup> “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

<sup>3</sup> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of birth pains.

<sup>9</sup> “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. <sup>10</sup> At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, <sup>11</sup> and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. <sup>12</sup> Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, <sup>13</sup> but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. <sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— <sup>16</sup> then

let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>17</sup> Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. <sup>18</sup> Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. <sup>19</sup> How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! <sup>20</sup> Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

<sup>21</sup> For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again. <sup>22</sup> If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. <sup>23</sup> At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. <sup>24</sup> For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. <sup>25</sup> See, I have told you ahead of time. <sup>26</sup> ‘So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.

<sup>27</sup> For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Immediately after the distress of those days  
“the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;  
the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

<sup>30</sup> ‘Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And 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.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. <sup>33</sup> Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. <sup>34</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

<sup>36</sup> ‘But about that Day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup> As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the Day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what Day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

## 2. Emphasis

- Jesus returns to complete the salvation of his people and to finally judge all other people.
- How you ought to live as a Christian

## 3. Explanation for the group leader

The message of Matthew chapter 24 (and 25) is that Christians must be watchful keeping their eyes on the second coming of Christ as the One who judges and rewards. The prophecies in these chapters refer on the one hand to the near future of the disciples of Christ and on the other hand to the events in the end-time. The coming judgment on Jerusalem (in the near future of the disciples) and the final judgment of the whole world at the second coming of Christ (in the end-time) are woven together in one teaching about the last things. The approaching catastrophe coming over Jerusalem serves as an illustration (type) of the future reality, the definite catastrophe coming on the whole world in the end-time (the anti-type).

### 23:37 – 24:3. The occasion.

The occasion for this teaching was the lamentation of Jesus Christ over Jerusalem and the two questions of the disciples.

### 24:4-14. The beginning of the woes.

Many tribulations (e.g. wars, famines, and earthquakes) will accompany the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to all the nations in the world. All these things must happen, but these tribulations (John 16:33; cf. Revelation 7:14) are not yet the end.

Matthew 24:4-14 is a part of the long period between the first coming and the second coming of Christ.

### 24:15-20. The tribulation of Jerusalem.

The great tribulation at the end of the New Testament period would be preceded by the tribulation of Jerusalem in the near future.

In verse 15 Jesus refers to the prophecy in Daniel about the abomination that causes desolation that would stand in the holy place (the temple) (Daniel 9:27).

The prophecy of Daniel about this tribulation of Jerusalem and Judea was fulfilled in 167 B.C. when the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes caused Jerusalem

to be plundered and the temple to be desecrated. The apocryphal book, 1 Maccabees 1:41-57 describes this event as follows:

[41] Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people,  
[42] and that each should give up his customs.  
[43] All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath.  
[44] And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land,  
[45] to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and feasts,  
[46] to defile the sanctuary and the priests,  
[47] to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals,  
[48] and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane,  
[49] so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances.  
[50] "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die."  
[51] In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. And he appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the cities of Judah to offer sacrifice, city by city.  
[52] Many of the people, every one who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land;  
[53] they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.  
[54] Now on the fifteenth Day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year (calculated from the foundation of the Dynasty of the Seleucids in 312 v.C., thus in December 167 B.C.), they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering (cf. Matthew 24:15). They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah,  
[55] and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets.  
[56] The books of the law (e.g. the Bible) which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire.  
[57] Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death.

In Matthew 24:15-20 Jesus says that this prophecy of Daniel (about a great tribulation) would be fulfilled a second time. Then it would specifically concern the temple and the people at that time in Jerusalem.

This second great tribulation of Jerusalem was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Roman emperor, Titus, besieged and conquered Jerusalem. The heathen soldiers carried standards on which the Roman idols were depicted (thus,

another abomination that causes desolation) into Jerusalem and into the temple (Luke 21:20-24).

However, Jesus says that this tribulation of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. would *not* be the end of this age (i.e. it would not be the end of the whole New Testament period, which would end with the second coming of Christ), because Jerusalem would be trampled by the heathen (for a long time) until the time of the Gentiles would be fulfilled (Luke 21:24; cf. Romans 11:25; Revelation 11:2).

These tribulations of Jerusalem (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) *foreshadow* similar tribulations (horrors) in the history of the world thereafter (cf. Matthew 24:4-14). The oppression and persecution of Christians would continue from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ. That is why the book of Revelation calls the whole period between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ 'the great tribulation' (Revelation 7:9,14).

#### **24:21-26. The great tribulation shortly before the second coming of Christ.**

The tribulations of Jerusalem at the beginning of the New Testament period was great, but the tribulation at the end of the New Testament period will be the greatest tribulation in human history (verse 21)! Christians will be oppressed and persecuted all over the world. This last great tribulation will be the end of all the foregoing tribulations (cf. Matthew 24:4-14). It will close the New Testament period.

During this final great tribulation there will be many false prophets and false messiahs who will perform great miracles in order to deceive the Christians. However, Jesus Christ clearly says that it is impossible to deceive the elect Christians (Matthew 24:24; cf. John 17:12)!

#### **24:27-31. The second coming of Christ.**

This final great tribulation will be terminated by the second coming of Christ.

- The second coming will be *sudden and unexpected*. It will be *visible everywhere*, just as the lightning is seen from the east to the west (Matthew 24:27; cf. verse 29).
- The second coming will be *audible everywhere*, due to the loud command of the Lord and the sounding of a loud trumpet call that will resurrect all the dead in their graves (Matthew 24:31; John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

- The second coming will be *experienced by everyone*: the angels will gather the elect (genuine Christians) immediately to welcome Jesus Christ in the air (Matthew 24:40a,41,a; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10), but will leave all non-Christians and unbelievers to be driven before Christ's judgment throne later on that final Day of the Lord (Matthew 24:40b,41b; cf. Matthew 25:31-33; Revelation 20:11-12).
- The second coming *will shake the heavenly bodies* and cause them to flee away (Matthew 24:28; cf. Revelation 20:11). Thus the final judgement of people in the upper regions will be accompanied by the final judgement of the universe and the old earth.

#### **24:32-35. The parable of the fig tree.**

When the disciples (of Jesus Christ) *see* all these things happening that culminate in the appearance of the abomination that causes desolation in the temple in Jerusalem (in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.), then they will know that the destruction of the temple is nearby. This is Christ's answer to the first question of his disciples (Matthew 24:3a).

#### **24:36-44. Christians must be watchful and ready always.**

The flood during the days of Noah was sudden, unexpected and experienced by everyone! Likewise, the second coming of Christ will be sudden, unexpected and experienced by everyone! The second coming will be completely unpredictable for non-Christians and Christians alike. No one will know when it will take place.

At his second coming, Jesus Christ will not welcome each and every person in his eternal and glorious presence forever, because one person (the Christian) will be accepted and another person (the non-Christians) will be left behind!

#### **24:45-51. Christians must be faithful servants.**

The parable of the faithful and wise servant teaches that because Christians do not know the time of the second coming, Christ must find them occupied with service in his kingdom when he comes!

#### **4. Explanation of the parable of the fig tree**

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is told in a particular context and may have an application or explanation. From these elements we must try to grasp the one message of the parable.

##### **[Step 1] Understand the story of the parable.**

What are the real-to-life elements of the story?

The parable in Matthew 24:32-34 is rather 'an illustrative comparison' than 'an illustrative story'.

- *The first comparison with a fig tree in Isaiah 34:4.* Jesus probably thought of the first comparison made with a fig tree, which speaks about the events in the end-time. The falling of the stars in the end-time is compared to the falling of fig leaves in a storm wind.

- *The second comparison with a fig tree in Matthew 24:32-34.*

Here Jesus makes a second comparison with a fig tree, which speaks about the signs of coming events. The story of the parable stands in verse 32. What Jesus said about the fig tree can also be said about other trees that lose their leaves (Luke 21:29-30)! When the leaves of a tree begin to sprout all people know that the summer is near.

##### **[Step 2] Study the context of the story and determine the elements of the parable.**

The elements of a parable are: the background, the story and the explanation or application.

- *The background of the parable is the teaching of Jesus about being watchful (Matthew chapter 24-25).*

The message of both chapters is that Christians must be watchful with a view to the second coming of Christ as Judge and Rewarder.

The prophecies in these chapters refer on the one hand to the events *in the near future of the disciples* of Christ and on the other hand to the events *in the end-time*.

The approaching judgment of Jerusalem soon after the first coming of Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 24:15-20) and the final judgment of the whole universe at the second coming of Jesus (cf. Matthew 24:21-31,42-51) is woven together in the teaching of Christ about the last things. The approaching judgment of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. serves as an illustration (type) of the future reality, the final judgment over the whole earth in the end-time (the anti-type).

- *The story of the parable stands in Matthew 24:32b.*

- *The explanation or the application of the parable stands in Matthew 24:33-35.*

## The explanation of the parable

### (1) *The two questions and the two answers*

In Matthew 23:37 to 24:3 Jesus speaks about the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. At that time his disciples asked him two questions:

*The first question:* “When will his all happen?” That is, “When will Jerusalem and the temple be destroyed?” This is an event in the near future of the disciples.

*The second question:* “and from which sign (singular) would we recognise the second coming and (i.e. ‘that is’) the end of the age?” This is an event in the end-time.

The word ‘and’ in the Greek is here not a conjunction, but an explanation: ‘*namely*’. The second coming of Jesus will not take place a long time before the end of the age. For example: there will not be a thousand years between the second coming of Christ and the end of the history of this world! The one and only second coming of Jesus Christ will be the end of the age, the completion of human history on this present earth! The one and only sign of this great event is the appearance of Jesus Christ himself at his second coming!

The explanation of the parable of the fig tree (verse 33) has reference to the first question of the disciples (verse 3a). The continuing teaching of Jesus (verse 34-35) has reference to the second question of the disciples (verse 3bc).

### (2) *The first question*

“When will his all happen?” That is, “When will Jerusalem and the temple be destroyed?” This is an event in the near future of the disciples (Matthew 24:3a).

*The first answer:* “So, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door” (Matthew 24:33).

Jesus Christ was addressing his own disciples. The words: “when *you* (his own disciples and not Christians living today) *see* all these things, they will know that the end of Jerusalem and the temple is near.”

These words must refer to the fulfilment of the prediction of Jesus Christ in so far the fulfilment of this prediction can be seen by his disciples! Jesus predicted that already his disciples would see false messiahs that would deceive many; they would hear of wars and earthquakes and they would be persecuted. And when they would see the Roman army with its heathen idols besiege (from 66 A.D.) and finally enter Jerusalem, they must know that the destruction of the temple is right at the door! The disciples would *be witnesses* of this

destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The heathen Roman army would carry their standards depicting heathen gods into the temple at Jerusalem (Luke 21:20). This was indeed fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Roman general Titus conquered and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Therefore it is logical to explain verse 33 as follows: When the disciples of Jesus Christ (and therefore NOT Christians living today) see all these things coming, they would know that the fall of Jerusalem and the temple was about to happen!

### (3) *The second question*

“And from which sign (singular) would we recognise the second coming and (i.e. ‘that is’) the end of the age?” The disciples expected a special event as the sign of the end-time (i.e. the completion of human history on this present earth) (Matthew 24:3bc).

*The second answer:* “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened (Matthew 24:34).

The Greek word for ‘sign’ refers to an event that takes place in the sphere of creation, but points to an event in the sphere of (the history of) salvation. This is also the meaning of the word ‘sign’ in the Gospel of John (John 2:11; 6:14,30; 20:30-31). The disciples asked which specific event in the history of the world would point to the second coming of Christ that would also bring the salvation of all his people.

The disciples had taken the words of Jesus Christ about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple to be this specific sign of the end of the world (cf. Acts 1:6-7). Their understanding was wrong. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would NOT be the specific sign of the end of the world! There would follow a long period of time between the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple on the one hand and the end of the world at his second coming on the other hand!

The events during this long period of time between his present first coming and his future second coming would be the following:

- Many false messiahs and false prophets from various religions would arise and deceive millions and millions of people.
- There would be many wars, famines, earthquakes, etc. Jesus calls all these events: ‘the beginning of birth pains’ which should not alarm Christians (Matthew 24:4-8).
- Christians would be hated by people from all the nations because they believe in Jesus Christ and proclaim Jesus Christ. They would be persecuted and

even killed.

- Many nominal Christians would fall away from the Christian Faith, leave the Church and even betray genuine Christians.
- There would be an increase in lawlessness and wickedness in opposition to the culture of the kingdom of God all over the world (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8).
- The (natural) love of most people in the world would grow cold.
- However, before the end of this present world and its history, the gospel of the kingdom of God (and its kingdom culture) would be proclaimed as a testimony to all the nations (Matthew 24:4-14)!

It is clear that all these events from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ could not be seen by the small group of original disciples of Jesus Christ. The words: “when you (the disciples) see all these things” (verse 33) are not the same as the words: “until all these things have happened” (verse 34). While the words: “see all these things” (verse 33) refer to the events during the lives of the disciples of Jesus Christ, the words “all these things have happened” (verse 34) refer to the events during the whole New Testament period until the second coming of Jesus Christ!

(4) *The generation that will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened (Matthew 24:34)*

In this context the words in verse 35 refer to the end of this present age together with its history. Also Matthew 24:36 to 25:46 refer to the events round the second coming of Jesus Christ (the end-time events). Thus the events of verse 34 happen until the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The word: ‘this generation’ (Matthew 24:34) does not need to be limited to ‘a particular generation’ in the sense of ‘a group of contemporaries of each other’ (e.g. the present generation of people living in the beginning of the 21st century)! The word ‘generation’ means more than simply ‘a generation living in a particular time period’.

It also means: ‘a generation in the sense of a kind of people’: e.g. a perverse generation (Deuteronomy 32:20, a stubborn and rebellious generation whose hearts are not loyal to God and whose spirits are not faithful to him’ (Psalm 78:8), ‘a corrupt generation’ (Acts 2:40), a crooked and depraved generation (Philippians 2:15) and a generation with whom God is angry because their hearts are always going astray and they do not know God’s way (Hebrews 3:10). All these references in the Bible are especially used with respect to Israel. The words: ‘this generation’ in Matthew 24:34 also refer especially to the Jews as a kind of people and thus NOT

to people in general living in the present time period.

Jesus says to his (Jewish) disciples that the end of Jerusalem and the temple (that would happen in 70 A.D.) would not be the end of the Jews (as the disciples were inclined to think). Also the Jewish generation (as a kind of people) would not pass away before all these events between the first and second coming of Christ have taken place. The descendants of Israel will never cease to be a nation before God (Jeremiah 31:36; cf. “All elect Israel will be saved”, Romans 11:26)!

The natural nation of Israel had crucified their Messiah in spite of all the privileges they enjoyed. That is why it seems logical that the whole natural nation of Israel should be wiped out. But the Lord Jesus Christ teaches here what the apostle Paul teaches in Romans chapter 11: that the Jews as a natural and national generation (i.e. a generation in the sense of a kind of people) would continue to exist until the second coming of Jesus Christ. He teaches that in every generation of Israel (i.e. a generation as a period of time) until the second coming of Christ, God would save ‘a remnant (of Jews) chosen by grace’ through faith, just as he would save ‘people from the Gentile nations by faith (Romans 1:16; 3:30; 11:5).

Although the original disciples of Jesus Christ would *not see* all these events, these events *will certainly take place!* And as certain as this present heaven and earth will pass away, so certain will these words of Jesus Christ never pass away (Matthew 24:35)! That is why the words of Jesus Christ are the foundation on which Christians build their faith!

Conclusion:

- Matthew 24:33 is the answer of Jesus Christ to the question of his own disciples in Matthew 24:3a.
- And Matthew 24:34 is the answer of Jesus Christ to the question of his own disciples in Matthew 24:3bc.

(5) *‘Seeing’ the terrors of the great tribulation is applied differently in Mark and Matthew on the one hand and Luke on the other hand*

This parable is applied differently by Mark and Matthew than Luke (Luke 21:29-33). While Mark and Matthew speak about the fall of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-20) as an illustration (type) of the fall of the whole world in the end-time (Matthew 24:21-29), Luke differentiates between the fall of Jerusalem on the one hand (Luke 21:20-24) and the fall of the whole world on the other hand (Luke 21:25-28).

The words: ‘the great tribulation’ in Mark 13:19,24 and in Matthew 24:21,29 have a double significance: ‘the great tribulation’ refers on the one hand to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Mark 13:14-18; Matthew 24:15-

20) *and* on the other hand to what would happen shortly before the second coming of Jesus Christ (Mark 13:19-27; Matthew 24:21-31).

But ‘the tribulation’ (‘the time of punishment in fulfilment of all that has been written’) in Luke 21:20-24a refers only to what would happen at the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

And ‘the signs’ (the things that would overcome the whole world) (Luke 21:25-28) refer only to what would happen in the end-time at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

That is why the words: “*when you see* these things happening” (Luke 21:31) refer only to the events that would happen in connection to the second coming of Christ as predicted by Jesus Christ in Luke 21:25-28 and would only be seen by the people who live at the second coming of Jesus Christ! When the Christians (living at the second coming of Christ) see these things happening, they will know that the kingdom of God (in its final perfect phase) is near (Luke 21:28). But also they will not be able to predict the Day or hour of the second coming of Jesus Christ (Matthew 24:36)!

Nevertheless, all three Gospels teach that ‘this generation’ (this race of natural and national Jews) would not stop to exist until all these events have taken place (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32).

### [Step 3] Identify the relevant details in the story of the parable.

The fig tree can be any other kind of tree that loses its leaves and is not a relevant detail. What is important is that the sprouting of new leaves announce the arrival of a new period of time (the summer). It is a visible sign that something is about to happen.

### [Step 4] Identify the message of the parable.

The most important message of the parable of the fig tree is that “the events prophesied by Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 24 will certainly take place between his first coming and his second coming.”

These events should urge Christians to be watchful and prepared for his second coming!”

## VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

*Pray* with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

*Pray* with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

## VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

*Hand out* the preparation for the next gathering.