



## **“Signs of the Second Coming?”**

### **Part I**

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I want to look at a topic of great interest in our time, the coming of Jesus. Specifically, does the Bible give us signs that Jesus is about to return? When Jesus left this world, the angel declared that He would one day come again, and Jesus promised to return several times during His ministry. Are we quickly approaching the time when Jesus will come again? Does the Bible give us any idea as to the times in which He will return? You don't have to look very far to find preachers and others who will tell you that we are now living in the end times. They claim that the events we see unfolding in the world today all point to the imminent return of Christ. Earthquakes, fires, floods, political upheavals, civil unrest, the viral spread of immorality and godlessness...we're told that these all point to the skies and the rapid return of Jesus. But is that the case? Make no mistake: He will indeed come again. We're to always be ready, for He could come as soon as today. He could come at any time. But are there signs that point to the time of His coming?

**Matthew 24:1-3 “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”**

Jesus then goes on to enumerate a number of signs and indicators that the things He was speaking of were about to take place. But was He talking about His second coming? You might be surprised by the answer.

The conversation recorded in **Matthew 24** took place in Jerusalem during the final week before Jesus' crucifixion. As Jesus left the temple, His disciples came to Him to show Him the beautiful buildings of the temple. Herod's temple was indeed a wonder to behold and it was a matter of national pride to the Jews, including Jesus' disciples. However, Jesus knew what was about to unfold that week in Jerusalem. The people would soon be calling for His crucifixion, and with this rejection of their Messiah, they would be sealing their fate as a nation. The city of Jerusalem and the temple, including the religion it represented, would be destroyed by the hand of God as a new covenant and a new Israel was established through Christ's death. God would pour out His judgment through the Romans who would invade Jerusalem forty years later and destroy the city. As the disciples proudly pointed out the beautiful buildings of the city to Jesus, Jesus startled them with words prophesying its doom.

**Matthew 24:2 "And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."**

This was a stunning prediction. It was difficult for them to imagine any event except the end of time itself that would result in the destruction of the temple.

**Matthew 24:3 "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"**

Here the disciples ask Jesus three questions: 1) *When shall these things be?* What things? The destruction of the temple which Jesus described in **verse 2**. 2) *What will be the sign of thy coming?* Jesus had at different times during His ministry told them of His return and of the end of the world. So, when He now prophesies the destruction of the temple, they thought that must be when the end of the world would come. We know this by the third question they asked. 3) *What will be the sign of the end of the world?* The word translated *world* here could also be translated *age*. But in the minds of these Jewish disciples, the destruction of the Jewish temple must mean the end of everything, the end of the world, and the end of time itself. Jesus carefully dispels this notion and shows that the event He is referring to in **verse 3** is not the end of time, but the end of the temple and the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Jewish religious economy that went along with the temple.

It is my belief that Jesus first addresses the timing of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, then later in this discourse turns His attention to the final judgment and the end of the world—again, much later in the chapter. Thus, the signs and prophecies found in the major portion of **Matthew 24** have really nothing to do with the end of time and Jesus' second coming, but rather have to do with things that would take place in the forty years between the death of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Notice carefully how Jesus walks them through a series of events.

**Matthew 24:4-8 "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. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."**

You see, these things would be taking place during the time after His ascension, causing them to wonder if the end was at hand. But notice that Jesus says that these things do not signal the end. Although it

would be easy to think that God's judgment was on the verge of being poured out during such tumultuous and uncertain times, Jesus says those things would occur but would not signal the impending end of the temple.

Today, people get all excited about things they see on the news. Natural disasters, political upheavals, world disorder...many say these things mean we're living in the end times. That we should see them as signs that Jesus is about to return. But the things Jesus mentioned here had nothing to do with His second coming. Nor did they mean that the destruction of Jerusalem was at hand, because He says, *"...but the end is not yet."* All the things that Jesus lists are documented to have taken place throughout the first forty years of the gospel age throughout the Roman Empire.

In fact, when He spoke these words, there was generally peace throughout the Roman Empire, but within a short amount of time, things began to change. There were insurrections, uprisings, and conflicts flaring up in Palestine and throughout the Empire. The Jews, being subject to the Romans at this time, were kept in a state of uncertainty and turmoil due to the unrest taking place throughout the world. If you trace the four hundred so-called 'silent years' of the intertestamental period, there was a lot of political upheaval involving the Jews; they were dominated by one nation, then another, then back to this nation, then another. There was much unrest for hundreds of years, setting the stage for the first century and the conditions that allowed the Messiah to be born and the spread of the gospel throughout the world. But all of that unsettledness eventually brought a time of peace while the Romans were in control and Jesus was born and lived. However, just like in the past, that was going to change. There were going to be wars and rumors of wars in the near future.

Jesus also mentions earthquakes and other disasters and a number of famines and pestilences. Earthquakes were documented throughout Judea at that time. Palestine, Asia Minor, and Europe experienced those kinds of things during that period. Just as Jesus said, the uncertainty and anxiety that these events would create in the minds of people would make them vulnerable to men who would then arise and claim to be the Messiah, there to save them from the turmoil surrounding them. Jesus said that many would be deceived. Not unlike our own day when preachers and so-called prophets go about predicting the end of time because of the supposed signs they see in this period. Jesus said not to be deceived by such. And Jesus WAS a true prophet, and the things He predicted here in our text were not to take place in our day and time, but long before. They were to take place in THEIR day and time—in the first century, between the ascension of Christ and the fall of Jerusalem forty years after that. Jesus says for them not to be alarmed or unsettled by those things when they hear of them, that they were not signaling the end. He even says that much worse things so far as they were concerned would happen before the end came.

**Matthew 24:8-13** *"All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."*

This describes the whole period of time documented throughout the book of **Acts** and the epistles. This is exactly what happened to the apostles and many within the church as it faced opposition from the Jewish leaders and the Roman government eventually. The blood of martyrs freely flowed as persecution erupted in Jerusalem, starting in **Acts 7**, spreading throughout the Roman Empire as Christianity expanded throughout the world. Such persecution presented many Christians with a great

temptation to forsake the faith, but Jesus said that *they that endure to the end, the same shall be saved*. We know that's a true statement for Christians of any age, spiritually speaking. But what was Jesus referring to on this particular occasion?

You see, Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 would bring with it the slaughter of 1.1 million Jews according to Josephus. But no Christians died in the siege. Why? Because Jesus warned them, you see. He told them when and how to escape. If they had failed to believe Jesus and turned back to Judaism, they'd have been among that awful number who died when Titus invaded the city. So, these warnings and predictions have nothing to do with the end of time. They had to do with the end of the Jewish age, the temple, and the end of Jerusalem as God's holy city here upon this earth. Jesus says these things will all come to pass, but the end will not come yet. Notice what He says must first happen.

**Matthew 24:14 "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."**

Jesus says the sign that the end is ready to come, the thing that will precede the end of that age or the end of the temple is that the gospel will be preached to the whole world. Someone says, *See there? This must be talking about the end of time because the world continues and there are people in the world who still have not heard the gospel*. But here we must let the Bible respond. Read what Paul wrote to the church at Colossae.

**Colossians 1:23 "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;"**

Paul wrote that in the AD 60's, near the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and just as Jesus said would be the case, before the temple was destroyed, Paul says the gospel had indeed been preached to the whole world at that time. We know that in **Acts 2** there were Jews in Jerusalem out of every nation and thousands of them were baptized and doubtlessly carried the gospel back to their homelands. So, immediately the gospel began to spread throughout the world. Thus, Paul said by the time soon before Jerusalem was destroyed, the gospel had been preached everywhere. Jesus said that after this took place, that's when the end, or the destruction of Jerusalem, would come.

With that as a precursor to the impending judgment about to be poured out upon Jerusalem, Jesus says they need to be watching.

**Matthew 24:15-21 "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."**

Jesus says when the gospel has been preached everywhere, then be watching for *the abomination of desolation* that Daniel had prophesied about hundreds of years before. What does that mean? The word *abomination* means something *detestable*. It was often used in the Old Testament to refer to the things

pertaining to pagans and idolatrous worship. In Luke's account of Jesus' prophecy, he tells us exactly what this would be.

**Luke 21:20-21** “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.”

The armies would be those led by Titus. Armies of Roman soldiers who would approach, encircle the city, and finally invade it. They would think of their arrival as *the abomination of desolation* because the Romans were heathens and pagans, carrying their ensigns of the Caesar and pagan emperor worship. That would be abominable to the Jews. The arrival of the Roman armies would mean the desecration and destruction of the beloved and (in their eyes) still holy temple. Jesus told His disciples that when they see the Roman armies approaching, they were to flee to the mountains. Get out and away from the city as to not be caught in the bloodshed and destruction. That's why He says not to stop and go back to get their possessions, and to pray that it didn't happen in the winter when fleeing into the mountains would be difficult.

The horrific tribulation that Jesus speaks of in **verse 21** refers to the unspeakable horrors that unfolded in Jerusalem when the Romans invaded. The streets of Jerusalem became a river of blood. Read Josephus, the Jewish historian's account of the destruction of Jerusalem. It's chilling! So many Jews were crucified by the Roman soldiers until they ran out of wood to build crosses. Josephus pictures that period as the most bloody and violent siege in the history of Jerusalem and even the world! Jesus is giving His disciples warning before it happens, telling them that the destruction of Jerusalem—all these buildings of the temple—would come down, leaving the temple in ruins, and the old religious economy it represented in the ash heap of history, as a new and a better way was about to be unveiled after Christ's death and resurrection.

Friend, the fact is that the Bible gives no signs of Christ's second and final return. The early Christians were warned about the destruction of Jerusalem so they could flee and not be caught up in it. We're promised that Jesus will one day come again, but instead of being told what to look for so far as the times, we're told WHO to look for, and that is Jesus Himself. In other words, we're to always be watching and waiting for His sudden return when we will then stand before Him in judgment and receive the rewards of this life. That day IS coming. But the Bible teaches it's going to come as a thief in the night. There will be no warning. And yes, it could be as soon as today, tomorrow, a year from now, but in could just as easily be a thousand years from now. The Bible tells us that a thousand years is as a day with the Lord (**II Peter 3:8**).

The fact is, if we would spend as much time, energy, and interest preparing for Jesus' return as some do needlessly trying to decipher and predict the time of his return, we'd be a lot better off. We would actually be prepared to meet Him when He comes. Jesus went on to say this:

**Matthew 24:36** “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”

Here, Jesus is answering the third question that the disciples had asked in **verse 3**. That is, *When will the end of the world come?* After Jesus told them when the temple would be destroyed, He told them that no man knows that day. Only God knows. He gave them this admonition and it is given to us as well:

**Matthew 24:42 “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”**

The Lord willing, in our next study together, we’ll continue looking at this chapter and see what we might learn about Jesus’ coming and judgment on Jerusalem and also about His second coming to judge this world.

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