

"Should We Look for Signs?"

Matthew 24:1-15

Should we be looking for "signs" of the end? For hints that Jesus' return may not be far off? The best answer to that question is the most important question we should always be asking, what does the Bible say about this? And not surprisingly the bible has an answer for this, right from the lips of Jesus Himself in Matthew 24. Another very important question to ask when studying the Bible is what is the context in which these words were spoken?

In Matt 21 Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey a week before His resurrection on what we call Palm Sunday. The people and children were shouting hosannas, here comes the Son of David, all kinds of Messianic fervor. The Pharisees and religious rulers are not as enthused. The next day Jesus enters the temple, thoroughly disgusted by seeing the Court of Gentiles run over with a Jewish flea market, where sellers are taking advantage of travellers to Jerusalem for Passover by charging them extra for 'kosher' sheep, or exchanging their money with high exchange rates because only shekels are allowed in the temple. Stuff like that. Jesus upsets the tables which upsets the sellers and religious leaders who challenge Jesus' authority through various tests and trick questions over the next few days. Jesus challenged them directly in 22:41-46 when He had a question of His own which they refused to answer.

In Matt. 23 Jesus addresses His disciples and the crowds by warning them to be wary of the Pharisees and religious leaders who are misleading the people away from God while pretending to be God's voice. The chapter ends with Jesus lamenting over the city of Jerusalem saying,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

At this point Jesus concludes His public ministry. The nation of Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Jesus says prophetically that He will not appear to the nation until they repent of their rejection of Him and desire Him to be their Messiah, which will happen according to Zech. 13 at the end of the 7-year tribulation period/70th week of Daniel.

Ignoring the chapter division we keep reading,

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. ² "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down."

The disciples, picking up no doubt on Jesus' statement 'Your house is left to you desolate' are somewhat confused and point out to Jesus, 'Look at the temple's magnificence!' And it was a site to behold. The historian Josephus remarked that there was so much gold on the outside of the temple that if it was sunny that you couldn't look directly at it. As well, there was all kinds of marble flooring that you thought it had snowed.

But this is Herod's temple, with Herod's handprints all over it. The Pharisees and Sadducees had lost touch with God and were running a religious program not teaching people the path to God by

faith, rejecting God's own Son. And Jesus' statement startles the disciples who interpret that Jesus must be talking about the end times when they know from Daniel and Jeremiah and Isaiah and others that judgment is coming to Israel and the temple one day at the coming of the Messiah. So, they ask Jesus ...

"Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Jesus answers their questions; not in the order of how they asked and maybe not exactly what they wanted to hear but He does answer the question. And in answering the question He tells us some signs; indicators that are not immediately apparent but point to something happening soon. And Jesus first talks about a near future sign, a sign that will be fulfilled within their lifetime, the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 AD. So, when it comes to looking for signs let's listen to Jesus tell us what to watch for:

Since Jesus Said Herod's Temple Would be Destroyed Exactly as He Said ... (24:1-3)

Then I believe we should believe Jesus' words about the future of His own return, in detail as we were told in detail about His first coming. Jesus said of the temple's destruction which would happen in 40 years that 'not one stone would be left on another; every one will be thrown down.' According to Josephus. The Romans had had enough of Jewish revolts and after a rebellious Jewish faction had sequestered themselves inside the city walls, the Roman army broke through and mercilessly killed thousands and burned the temple to the ground. Much of the temple itself was made of wood covered in gold. So when the gold melted it spilled into cracks in the stones. So the Romans literally separated the stones, throwing them over the walls to get at the gold.

Some think everything Jesus predicts in this chapter refers to 70 AD. However, there are numerous problems with that perspective. 1) Jesus didn't return as vv.29-30 says "immediately after those days; 2) there was no abomination of desolation in the temple in v.15 that Jesus predicted. Titus the Roman military leader at the time entered the Holy of Holies and was thoroughly unimpressed because there was nothing there. He didn't do anything else. And 3) where and how did the last 7 years of Daniel's prophecy fit into this? That is a very distinct period of time that as we'll see the abomination of desolation happens at the midpoint of the 7-year covenant meaning Jesus should have appeared in 73 AD.

However, the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and the destruction of the temple in 586 BC followed by Israel's exile and return all foreshadow a similar future event. Yes they were terrible, and the future similar fulfillment will be even worse.

So, Jesus's words were ***exactly fulfilled*** so then we should listen to what else He said:

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

Here's another indicator the closer we get to the last 7 years of Daniel's prophecy that ends in Jesus' return:

Since Jesus Said War, Famine, Earthquakes will Increase Before the End ... (24:4-9)

We should expect that the more these things happen the closer we are to Jesus' coming. And if you do any reading, we understand that more people have died from war in the 20th century than any other time period in history. 123 million people died in wars in the 20th century. That includes two world wars.

Here's some stats from a website called volcanodiscover.com/ earthquakes today:

How many quakes were there in the world today?

In the past 24 hours, there have been 91 quakes up to magnitude 5.8.

How many people are affected by earthquakes every year?

Each day, many thousands of people feel an earthquake somewhere. Stronger quakes can be felt by millions of people.

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly 750,000 people were killed by quakes and more than 125 million people injured, made homeless or displaced or otherwise seriously affected by earthquakes during the 20 years from 1998-2017.

And that doesn't include the last 6 years especially the earthquakes in Turkey/Syria which has taken over 50,000 lives. This is an indicator that these things are increasing.

Jesus continued in v.9,

⁹ "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,

Since Jesus Said False Messiahs Will Mislead Many Before the End ... (24:10-13)

Then again, we can expect a decline in the morality of our culture. An increase in persecution. A turning away from faith in Christ encouraged by false messengers and messiah types. If you go to Wikipedia you'll find a list of messiah claimants, all these people who have claimed to be the Messiah or in Islam, the Mahdi who accompanies Isa (Jesus) when He returns. Dozens of people, many of whom were from the last 150 years, some still living today.

It makes sense that if we're getting closer to Jesus' return (and Satan knows these things) he will ramp up his game and deceive as many people as possible. And even though we live in a culture that promotes 'love' of all kinds, this is lust and depravity because their hatred towards anyone who disagrees with him is very evident. And yet Jesus says this in v.13,

¹³ but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 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.

Since Jesus Said the Gospel Will Reach the Ends Of the Earth Before the End ... (24:14)

Then that means there will be the desire and the means to get the gospel to the ends of the earth. And I believe we can see this happening more now so then ever. Through internet, through expansive missions, through translation software, etc., the ways of gospel communication have exploded in the last 50 years. While North American churches are still sending the most missionaries to other parts of the world (appx 150,000), countries like Brazil have sent 40,000 missionaries, South Korea 35,000, the Philippines 25,000, Nigeria 20,000 and China 15,000 missionaries. If Jesus said this will happen before His return, then it will happen. Why? Because God is delaying Jesus' return so more people can get saved (2 Pet. 3:9).

The disciples asked Jesus the 'when' question, and now Jesus deals with that in v.14. There is still debate on whether vv. 5-13 refer to the church age, that broad range of time until the last 7 years of Daniel's revelation of 490 or the first 3 ½ years of the last seven years which is known as the Tribulation, which when you read Rev. 6-11, there are a lot of similarities. One main argument for it being the first half of the tribulation is v.15, because Jesus clearly refers to the middle of the 7-year Tribulation when the world ruler that we call the Anti-christ finally reveals Himself for who he is demanding the world worship him.

¹⁵ *"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—*

Here is the most obvious reason Jesus is not referring to 70 AD when Rome destroyed the temple, because He already said that would happen in v.3 and now He indicates there's going to be another temple one day. The 'abomination of desolation standing in the holy place' that Jesus says Daniel mentions refers to the 70th week of Daniel's revelation in Dan. 9, the last 7 years which begins with a covenant with Israel involving allowing them to sacrifice again; means they have to have a temple – only to have the covenant broken at the mid point (3 ½ years/42 months/1290 days) by the Anti-christ who according to Revelation 13, has a statue of Himself set up in the temple declaring Himself to be God, demanding the world's worship.

Since Jesus Said a Future Temple Will Be Built in Israel, Again to Be Defiled ... (24:15)

Then that gives a number of signs to watch for before it happens. For Israel to be in a position to be able to build a temple in Jerusalem again then,

Israel has to have sovereignty over themselves (Ezek. 37)

They have to be in their own country exercising authority over themselves no different than any other country. Most of you are thinking, yeah, so what? But you see when Israel was exiled from their land by Babylon in 586 BC, they have never had independence and able to rule their own country without having Persia, Greece, Rome, the Turks, the British giving them permission to do what they ask. Only since 1948 when the United Nations granted Israel the right to govern their own land has Israel been ruling themselves again. Doesn't mean they can't lose their sovereignty again. But most likely this is the most significant modern-day fulfilment of prophecy and a very important puzzle piece that needed to be in place so the rest of these prophecies can happen.

While in exile in Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel was given a vision by God of a valley of dry

bones. It's the nation of Israel. God asks Ezekiel if these dry bones can live again? Ezekiel says, 'Only You know Lord' and God breathed life into them again. Most people feel this is God depicting 1948, Israel's resurrection as a nation.

And if as Jesus says Israel is in their own land making their own decisions like making a future covenant probably trading land in exchange for a temple and protection by the false christ, indicating that the reader should understand the book of Daniel, then that means

The prophecies of Daniel are accurate (9:27; 11:31; 12:12)

Let's reread 9:27 which we covered 2 weeks ago:

He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

11:31 "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. ³² With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

In Daniel 11:1-35 Daniel receives revelation from Gabriel again about a future ruler who will prefigure the anti-christ and set up an abomination on the temple. This happened in 167 BC when a ruler of Rome named Antiochus Epiphanes slaughtered a pig on the altar. The Jews of his day revolted led by the Maccabee family and resecured the temple. However, Gabriel transitions from Antiochus to the future anti-christ in 11:36 because the one foreshadows the other and vv.36- Ch. 12 refer to the very end times, Daniel's 70th week. V. 36 begins ...

³⁶ "The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. ³⁷ He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. ³⁸ Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. ³⁹ He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price.

Ch, 12 continues the revelation of the end and we read in 12:11,

¹¹ "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. ¹² Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

3 ½ years is 42 months. 42 months (Jewish calendar) is 1260 days. Jesus helps us understand Daniel. We can trust the literal prophecies of Daniel because Jesus did. And if we can trust the prophecies of Daniel then we can

Trust the prophecies of Paul and John (2 Thes. 2:2-3; Rev. 13:

^{2 Thes. 2:3} Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Rev. 13:5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. ⁶ He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. ⁷ He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

¹¹ Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. ¹² He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. ¹³ And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. ¹⁴ Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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, ¹⁷ so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

So, if Matthew 24, Daniel 9-12; 2 Thes. 2; Rev. 13 all line up together with literal future interpretations giving us detailed info about the end

Then every prophecy can be literally trusted (Matt. 5:17-18)

¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Lord Jesus and heavenly Father, thank for Your Word. We never doubt anything Jesus says about anything else, yet why do we not trust Him when He tells us what will literally happen in the future? None of this is easy and we 'only see dimly' now, but Lord perhaps it's not as hard as we think. May we be burdened for the lost as we eagerly await a great future. A great future for us who know You, yet not so great for those who do not. So, help us Lord to share this message of hope and deliverance to a lost world who desperately need Jesus.

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If you have nay comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivvet@rideau.net