

“Signs of the Coming Savior”

May 16, 2021

Luke 21:20-28

I. Introduction

As Jesus and the Twelve were leaving the temple to go to the Mount of Olives, Jesus pronounced judgment on the temple and the hypocritical religion practiced there. In [Luke 21:6](#) He said, “**As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.**” Whenever Jesus predicted His death and resurrection, the disciples never asked when it would happen, but talk of the destruction of the temple filled their minds with questions. For devout Jews, the temple was the center of the universe. The total destruction of the temple indicated the end times to the disciples, so [Mark 13:3-4](#) says, “**As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?’**”

In response to their questions, Jesus gave a sermon regarding the end times and His return. This sermon, often called the “*Olivet Discourse*,” is Jesus’ longest recorded answer to any question asked Him in the Gospels—it’s also found in [Matthew 24:4-25:46](#) and [Mark 13:1-37](#). Jesus began by foretelling the events that would happen in the world preceding the end and His return, but He didn’t set an exact time when all these things would happen. He didn’t give the disciples (or us) the information that was *wanted*, **BUT** He gave what is *needed*. As we saw last week, using the metaphor of birth pains, Jesus explained that the end of the age would be accompanied with false teachers, false messiahs, wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, disease, fearful events, great signs from heaven, and violent persecution against believers. Although such certainties have been experienced up to the present time, their frequency and severity will rapidly and dramatically increase at the very end as the final judgment is about to be born. What we experience today is just a preview of the unparalleled destruction that will occur in the months prior to the return of the Son of God. In other words, things aren’t going to get better.

In today's Scripture, Jesus continued to describe the future events leading up to the end of the age.

His description began with the destruction of Jerusalem.

II. The Destruction of Jerusalem

In A.D. 70, forty years after Jesus spoke these words, Jesus' prediction that Jerusalem would suffer desolation was fulfilled. The Roman army under Titus Vespasian laid siege to Jerusalem, sacked the city, burned the temple, and slaughtered thousands of people. The Jewish historian Josephus claimed that nearly a million people were killed by the Romans and 97,000 taken captive. The historian Eusebius recorded that as the Romans were beginning to surround Jerusalem, the local Christians fled—most to Pella, one of the cities of Decapolis across the Jordan River, south of the Sea of Galilee.

This was not the first time Jerusalem would be “trampled on by the Gentiles” for the Babylonians had destroyed the city in 586 B.C. This was when “**the times of the Gentiles**” began. This significant period in God's plan—“**the times of the Gentiles**”—will end when Jesus Christ returns to the earth, destroys all Gentile power, and sets up His own righteous kingdom—**turn to Daniel 2:31-36, 44-45.**

In today's Scripture, Jesus was talking about Jerusalem in A. D. 70. In Matthew's account in **Matthew 24:15-28** and Mark's account in **Mark 13:14-23**, Jesus described Israel's situation in the middle of the Tribulation. The terrible events in A.D. 70 were just a “*dress rehearsal*” for what will happen when Satan vents his anger on Israel and the believing Gentiles during the last half of the Tribulation—**turn to Revelation 12:7-17**² In either time, it will be especially difficult for “**pregnant women and nursing mothers.**” Burdened as they are, such women will find it difficult to escape the “**great distress in the land and wrath**” that will be poured out on “**this people.**” Jesus said that not all who flee will escape. Many Christian martyrs and Jews will “**fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations.**” “**Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,**” i.e., they will not end until the future day of God's final vengeance and judgment comes.

Up to this point, Jesus had told the disciples about the destruction of the temple and what signs would point to the end of the age—the “time of Jacob’s trouble” described in [Jeremiah 30:7](#). But then Jesus went on to tell them about His own coming at the end of the Tribulation period.

III. The Return of the Messiah

The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will not be like His first Advent. His first Advent, His birth, was witnessed by only a few people; Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and perhaps a few others in Bethlehem. But when Jesus returns, the whole world will see Him—John wrote in [Revelation 1:7](#), “‘Look, he is coming with the clouds,’ and ‘every eye will see him, even those who pierced him’; and all peoples on earth ‘will mourn because of him.’” Jesus explained that the return of the Messiah will be heralded by some final signs—one sign will be cosmic signs.

A. Sign #1: Cosmic Signs Immediately before Jesus’ return, there will be vast cosmic calamities that will cause unimaginable destruction. Jesus said, “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars, … the roaring and tossing of the sea,” and “the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” The heavenly signs of which Jesus spoke which would foretell His return were also predicted by the prophets—e.g., [turn to Isaiah 13:9-13](#). [Joel 2:31](#) says, “The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” [Matthew 24:29](#) adds, “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.”

God is the Lord of the universe—as [Hebrews 1:3](#) says, “It is held together by God’s power.” Everything moves at God’s command. In [Joshua 10:13](#) we read that God “stopped the sun in the middle of the day and delayed it going down about a full day.” In [2 Kings 20:11](#), God made the earth go backwards in its rotation. When Jesus hung on the cross, [Luke 23:44-45](#) tell us that it was dark from noon until 3 pm. As the Creator of everything, God can move or stop or dim the sun and the moon and even cause the stars to go away. Nothing is too great for Him.

B. Sign #2: Terror in the World The devastating disturbances and calamities in the earth will cause terror throughout the unbelieving nations. This will be the second sign of Jesus’ return: Terror in the

world. After watching the terror and fear caused by the covid pandemic in which less than 3% of those infected died, can you imagine the terror and fear when a third of the population dies at one time ([Revelation 9:15](#))? Jesus used three different words to describe this terror.

The first word is “[anguish](#)” (some translations use the word “dismay”). Anguish is defined as “*an overpowering sense of acute, unrelieved distress, fear and torment.*” Jesus said there will be “[anguish and perplexity.](#)” Perplexity is “*the state of being very confused because something is difficult to understand.*” Finally, Jesus said, “[People will faint from terror.](#)” The Greek word literally means “*to breathe out,*” “*to stop breathing.*” “*to expire.*” In other words, people will literally be scared to death. Jesus was saying that in their overwhelming distress and fear, unable to understand what is happening around them, people will be frightened to death. Again, I say, just look around at those in this current pandemic.

The radical changes of the world and its environment, all the terrifying events that fill the Tribulation will lead to terror in the world. [Turn to Rev. 6:12-17.](#) [Isaiah 13:8](#) says, “[Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame.](#)” [Revelation 9:6](#) warns that “[During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.](#)”

The catastrophic end of human history will shock the unbelieving world. Due to hearing the preaching of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists ([Revelation 7:2-8](#)), the two witnesses ([Revelation 11:3](#)), the testimony of those saved in that time, and even flying angels ([Revelation 14:6-8](#)), people will understand that what is happening is the wrath of God. Some will believe, but most will refuse to repent and blaspheme God ([Revelation 16:11, 21](#)), Many who reject the truth will die; others will wish they were dead. It’s at this time that the final sign is seen, “[they will see the Son of Man.](#)”

C. Sign #3: The Son of Man The final sign will be the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man “[coming in a cloud with power and great glory.](#)” [Turn to the Revelation 19:11-16.](#) The “[white horse](#)” symbolizes power and authority. White, also, symbolizes the spotless, absolutely holy nature of Jesus Christ.

Because He is “Faithful and True,” He keeps His word and must act against sin—“in righteousness He judges and wages war.” “His eyes are a flame of fire,” is a reference to His absolutely accurate judgment. “His robe dipped in blood” could represent the blood of the enemies He has already conquered, or the blood of Christ shed to atone for the sins of the world. “The sharp sword” symbolizes the death-dealing power of His Word.

Unlike His first coming, when He came in humility to die as a sacrifice for sin, at His 2nd Advent, Jesus will come “in a cloud with power and great glory.” He will show His power by both destroying and renewing the world; defeating and judging Satan, the demons, Antichrist and his forces; and eliminating all the unrepentant, while at the same time establishing His kingdom for those who belong to Him (Matt. 25:34). Daniel wrote of His kingdom, turn to Daniel 7:13-14.

Jesus finished this section by saying, that “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” These awesome signs will bring terror to the lost people of the world but hope to those who have trusted the Lord during the Tribulation period and even before. There is no reason for them to cower in terror, they can stand up straight and lift up their heads with courage for these believers know that the Lord’s coming will be soon.

IV. Conclusion

Jesus and the Scriptures don’t tell us things to scare us but to encourage us. As we watch the chaos and violence and calamities around us, we sometimes get impatient with God’s control and timing. Like the psalmists, we complain that God doesn’t hear the cries of His people and that evil seems to be victorious. In today’s Scripture, Jesus is reminding us that God controls the direction of history. He calls us to be patient and not fearful. We are to use our time in presenting the Gospel of God’s grace to others. 2 Peter 3:9 reminds us that “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” We need to share the words from Isaiah 55:6-7, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the

LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” Those that delay to repent and be saved, risk the chance of spending an eternity in hell. As the sign in front of church says, “*Eternity is too long to be wrong.*”

As believers, we need to keep watch, stand fast, and trust God’s timing with the assurance that one day our deliverance will surely come. Events may be painful, for even our families may oppose us and hostility may grow. Whether we remember the early Christians or consider Christians living in the Middle East or in China today, commitment to Jesus through the centuries has frequently led to intense opposition and even death. Christians need to have resolve to endure, a resolve that is strengthened by the assurance that God will indeed do what He has promised. He will vindicate His children. Let me close with the closing words of Peter’s second letter—written just before his crucifixion during the reign of Nero—2 Peter 3:11-18: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, ... Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him, be on your guard, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.