

The Sign of His Coming

📖 Matthew 23:37–24:31

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📅 January 22, 2017

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When you come into the gospels you have this prophetic picture from the OT that looks like the kingdom of God can come. That's why John said "repent, the kingdom of God is at hand." It was near to coming. The fourth Gentile kingdom of Rome, prophesied by Daniel, had come, the 70 sevens calendar, revealed to Daniel, had almost run its course. You could even argue that they may have thought the first regathering in unbelief, prophesied by Ezekiel, had taken place under Cyrus so that all that remained was Elijah to come and restore the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers so that they would be regathered in belief and the kingdom of God would come. But all of that, John says, was contingent on a spiritual preparation of the nation Israel, who could have been Elijah. They needed to repent, which is to have a change of mind about the kind of righteousness necessary for the kingdom to come. If they did repent they would believe in the one John pointed to as the King. And when Jesus came John pointed Jesus out, He did the mighty works predicted of the Messiah, He had orthodox teaching, and yet the Pharisees and Sadducees would not repent. They went so far as to say that the works Jesus did were not done by the Spirit of God but by Satan himself who indwelt Jesus. Therefore, Jesus pronounced judgment on that generation, a judgment which came in AD70 when the Romans, under Titus, surrounded Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Thus, the kingdom of God was postponed, from the human point of view, a new age would intervene involving the soon to be established Church, and the prophesied kingdom would only come after the Church was complete and a generation of Israel repented and produced the fruit of the kingdom.

It's this theme of offer, rejection and postponement of the kingdom that gives us the background for Jesus' most extensive prophetic discourse, Matthew 24 and 25. Commonly known as the Olivet Discourse, because the location it was given was on Mount Olivet or the Mount of Olives, this discourse I prefer to call The Discourse on Kingdom Coming, because the content of the discourse is the events that immediately precede the kingdom's establishment on earth. And I want to teach this discourse in three sections. First, Matthew 23:37-24:31, The Sign of His Coming; second, Matthew 24:32-42, The Exhortations to Be Prepared for His Coming; and third, Matthew 24:43-25:46, The Judgments at His Coming. From the outline you see that in my estimation the entirety of the

discourse relates to the Second Coming and the generation that sees these things and not to the Rapture and the Church.

Today we look at the first of these three sections, The Sign of His Coming, in 23:37-24:31. If you turn to Matthew 23:37 we find in 23:37-24:3 The Setting for the discourse. Verse 37 is Jesus' pronouncement of rejection. That generation had rejected Him. **Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.** Jerusalem is the capital city of the Jewish people and thereby represents all the Jewish people. It is the Jewish people who **killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to her** and when Jesus came to them as the last and greatest of all God sent, they rejected and killed Him too. He had stretched out His hands to the Jewish people time and time again but they were a disobedient and obstinate people. He willed to gather them; they did not will to be gathered. So it's a picture of their rejection and obstinacy.

In 23:38 then a pronouncement of judgment. **Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!** The **house** is the Temple. The Temple was going to be destroyed. The Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians but rebuilt by Zerubbabel, expanded by the Maccabees and it was under construction in a further expansion at the time as designed by Herod the Great. So the temple was under construction but it was to be destroyed again. Now the only passage I know of in the OT that predicted this temple would be destroyed is Dan 9:26, right in the heart of the prophecy of the 70 sevens. And it says that after the 69 sevens "the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." So it prophesied of the destruction of both Jerusalem and the Temple. And this occurred in AD70 as a judgment for the unpardonable sin of the nation Israel, not just rejecting the Messiah but violently rejecting Him, committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by saying that the miracles Jesus had done by the Spirit had really been done by Satan.

Then in 23:39 Jesus pronounces a postponement of the kingdom. **For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, "BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!"** Who is the **you**? **For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say?** Who is the **you**? Well, it's not the apostles. He's not talking to the apostles. Who is He talking to? He's talking to "Jerusalem" of verse 37. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her!" And who does Jerusalem represent? The Jewish people. So then what does verse 39 mean? It means that the Jewish people **will not see** Jesus **until** they **say "BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!"** So the Second Coming is contingent on Israel saying these words. The words are from Ps 118:26. It's known as the Messianic Greeting. And the Jewish people will not see Jesus until they issue the Messianic Greeting. This fits really nice with the verse we mentioned last week, Matt 21:43, where Jesus said, "The kingdom is taken from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it." In other words, the

kingdom is being postponed until a future generation of Israel comes along and issues the Messianic Greeting. Then, and only then, will the kingdom come.

In 24:1 they're walking away from the temple. **Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.** They are having a hard time believing what He just said about **the temple**. How could the **temple** under construction be destroyed? It was marvelous architectural achievement even before its completion. And so they **came up to Him to point out the temple buildings.** They want further explanation. So in 24:2 **He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."** In other words, yes, guys, that's what I said, and that's what I meant, the temple **buildings** are going to be torn down, not the retaining wall around the temple, but everything on top of the platform created by the retaining wall, that is going to **be torn down**.

Now as they continued to walk they were thinking about this. What are they thinking about? How the pieces of prophecy from the OT fit together. How does this fit in the picture? They should have thought of Daniel 9:26 and they may have. But they certainly thought of Zechariah 12-14. Zechariah said the nations would attack Jerusalem and have initial victory; plundering the city, raping the women and destroying half of the population, leaving the other half trapped. At that time the Spirit would be poured out on the nation, they would come to faith and utter the Messianic Greeting. Then Jesus would return to rescue them and establish the kingdom. So they are trying to figure it all out and so in 24:3, **As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"** Now they come to Him. The parallel in Mark 13:3 says it was Peter and John and James and Andrew. Four of them came to Him and said, **when will these things happen?** That is, when will the Temple be destroyed? Then they said, **and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age.** The last question looks like two questions but it is really just one in the grammar. The reason is because the coming of Messiah brought an **end** to the present **age** and an establishment of the kingdom age. So they clearly know that He is leaving and they have two basic questions, one is a **when** question, **when** is the Temple is going to be being destroyed, and the other is a **what** question, **what** will be **the sign of Your coming**. I think they thought all these things would take place in close connection according to Zechariah's prediction but Jesus separated them.

The answer to the first question, regarding the Temple, is not recorded by Matthew, but Jesus gave it and Luke recorded it in Luke 21:12-22. It's interesting because Luke 21 is parallel in many respects except the section of vv 12-22 which has no parallel in Matt 24 or Mark 13. And in that section Luke describes the period of the Book of Acts when the apostles ministered and were persecuted and then Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies and that is when the believers should leave Jerusalem because Jerusalem would face the destruction for the unpardonable sin. But we're not going to go into that, except to say that Jesus did answer, it's in Luke 21:12-22,

and you can read it in your spare time but you won't find anything like that in Matthew. And the reason Matthew didn't say anything about it is because his interest is in the events that immediately precede the kingdom. Matthew is all about the King and His kingdom program and how can Jesus be the King if there is no kingdom now. The answer to that question is that the nation Israel rejected Jesus! That is why there is no kingdom now. But the kingdom will come in the future when they issue the Messianic Greeting. And that is what Matthew is interested in. So his interest is the second question, **what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?** And everything in this discourse relates to the events that will occur immediately before His coming to establish the kingdom and the things that will take place when He comes in His kingdom. They do not relate to the church. They aren't asking about the Church. They are asking about when He is coming to establish His kingdom because that is the whole prophetic program from the OT. Even in the Book of Acts they are wondering when the kingdom will come. They say to Jesus, "Is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" And so they have no clue about the Church, nor are they interested. So 23:37-24:3 are the Setting.

Now we come to 24:4-14, these verses cover the entire Tribulation because notice the phrase at the end of verse 3, **the end of the age**. This is key because as Jesus begins to answer, what do you see in verse 6, **You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end**. Verse 6 is not the end of the age. But notice verse 14, **This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come**. So verse 14 is the end and therefore the entire tribulation is sandwiched between verses 4-14.

Now we can divide vv 4-14 further because we know from Daniel that Israel experiences persecution in the second half and v 9 describes every nation on earth hating Israel. So verse 9 starts the second half. Therefore, vv 4-8 are The First Half of the Tribulation, which are the beginning of birth pangs. Vv 9-14 are The Second Half of the Tribulation, when Israel faces persecution. Then in 24:15-16 we have the event which begins The Second Half of the Tribulation, which is The Abomination of Desolation. Then we have 24:17-28 which is More Characterizations of the Second Half of the Tribulation. Then in 24:29-31 The Sign of His Second Coming.

Jesus begins describing the first half of the Tribulation in 24:4 with a warning, **And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you."** Who is **you**? It's the Jewish people. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets...." He's speaking **to** the apostles, but the message is **to** the Jewish people living in that time just before the coming of the Messiah in His kingdom. And what is the warning? **See to it that no one misleads you**. The time just before the coming of the Messiah in His kingdom will be characterized by great deception. Verse 4 warns of being **mislead**, verse 5 says many will be **mislead**, verse 11 says false prophets will **mislead** and verse 24 says signs and wonders will be so great they will almost **mislead** the elect. So the main characteristic of the future 70th week of Daniel is what? The danger of being **mislead**. Therefore, Jesus issues a warning to the Jewish people right from the beginning, in verse 4, **"See to it that no one misleads you"** about My coming.

Why? 24:5, **Because many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.** Early on in the 70th week **many** false Christs will come, not just one. Now hold your place here and turn to Rev 6:1-2. This is the first seal. In v 1 the Lamb breaks the seal and in verse 2 "I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." The first horse is "white," symbolizing peace, and the rider who sat on it has "bow" but no arrows and a crown and so a king. Who is the rider? The rider is not an individual but representative of a group of kings going forth to conquer the world with a message of peace. They are counterfeiting what Christ will do when He comes to conquer the world and bring in everlasting peace. Daniel just happened to prophesy of ten kings who would come and then an eleventh would rise above them all. Therefore, the ten kings seem to correspond to this rider and to be the false Christs that Christ predicted in Matt 24:5, saying, **many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ.'** So the first seal is parallel to Matt 24:5.

Hold your place in Rev 6 and look back at Matt 24:6, **You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. Wars and rumors of wars.** Take a look at Rev 6:3-4. This is the second seal. In v 3 the Lamb breaks the seal and in verse 4, "And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him." The second horse is "red," symbolizing bloodshed, and the rider "takes peace" from the earth. And what did Jesus say the Jews would be hearing of in 24:6? **Wars and rumors of wars.** There will be wars going on around the world. But what does Jesus say to the Jews at this time, **See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.** That is not yet the end of the 70th week of Daniel when Jesus will come. So while many think that wars and rumors of wars are signs that the end is near, Jesus says that they must take place but that **is not yet the end.**

In 24:7 Jesus explains more about these wars under the second seal. **For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines, which is the third seal, and earthquakes, which is the sixth seal.** Jesus is giving in summary form the events of the first half of the tribulation, which correspond to the six seals of Revelation. And so the things spoken of here do not relate to WWI and WWII or to the common claim that earthquake quantity or intensity are increasing today. They are not. I've looked at the USGS data for the 20th century and there was a slight decrease in both quantity and intensity of earthquakes over the last 100 years. So, the perception that there are getting to be more and greater earthquakes is due to increased number of seismographs and media reporting. We are actually experiencing a slight decrease and have been ever since the Flood and will continue to until the first truly global earthquake since the Flood, this one that occurs in Revelation 6:12-17 as part of the sixth seal. There are other things that will take place in the first half of the tribulation, but this is a summary of some of the things.

In 24:8 Jesus says, **But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.** The **birth pangs** is a metaphor used to characterize the struggle a woman has just as she is about to have a baby. Once they begin

they continue to intensify until the baby is born. In the OT it is used repeatedly as a technical name for the 70th week of Daniel because it describes the time of great difficulty in the world just before the kingdom arrives. The things in vv 4-8 are the first half of the Tribulation, they are the initial shocks, the **beginning of birth pangs** which will continue into the second half until the kingdom comes.

In vv 9-14 we come to The Second Half of the Tribulation. It's at this time that Daniel said the world will turn against Israel and that's what we find in v 9. **Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.** In particular, the hate will be against Jewish believers; **hated because of My name.** This will begin at the mid-point with the event described later in verse 15 as the abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel the prophet. In verse 10, **At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.** This is many Jews **falling away** in the sense of falling into the deception of the false prophets who will be pointing to the anti-Christ as the true Christ. As such they will betray their fellow Jews who do not follow after the anti-Christ. In verse 11, **Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.** I take it these are Jewish **false prophets** as Zech 13 confirms that by the end of the Tribulation the Jews who have come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah will kill them in order to remove idolatrous worship from the land in preparation for the Messiah's return. In verse 12 **Because lawlessness is increased most people's love will grow cold.** The world is headed toward a period of lawlessness but the lawlessness is defined in Dan 7 as laws that contradict Jewish laws and this is confirmed in verse 20 with the mention of the Sabbath. Because of this the love of many Jewish people will grow cold. They will become hardened against compassion toward others in this most difficult time and will not help them in their distress. **But,** verse 13, **the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.** That is, the one who **endures** in love and compassion for others **to the end**, when Messiah comes, **he will be saved, saved** in the sense of being physically rescued away from the anti-Christ and his armies. Verse 14 says **This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.** The **gospel of the kingdom** is the message that the kingdom is at hand. This will be preached to **all the nations** as a warning against fighting against this coming kingdom. The Book of Revelation says that during the second half of the Tribulation, an angel will fly in mid-heaven and proclaim the eternal gospel to all the earth. Of course, the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ will also be preached in this time. Therefore, during that time everyone will hear the message of Christ and that His kingdom is near at hand signifying they need to believe. **Then** Jesus says, **the end will come.** The **end** is the end of this present age which will be followed by the kingdom age. So by verse 14 you are already at the end of the tribulation. This is the end of the Second Half of the Tribulation.

The next section is vv 15-16 where we have The Abomination of Desolation, the event that triggers the beginning of the second half of the tribulation, where Israel is hated by all nations in verse 9. So He has gone back, and this is a common feature in Jewish narrative. **Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.** The **ABOMINATION OF**

DESOLATION was revealed in Dan 9:27 to occur in the middle of the 70th week so we know this is the midpoint. In verse 16 **the Jews who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.** From other passages we know they will flee to Petra in modern day Jordan.

In vv 17-28 we have More Characterizations of the Second Half of the Tribulation. Vv 17-18 are expressions of urgency of fleeing Jerusalem because of the danger they will be in from the anti-Christ. **Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.** Time will be of the essence for survival. Verse 19 is a warning to those who have difficulty travelling. **But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!** The warning would go for those with other difficulties inhibiting travel as well. In verse 20 a command is given for the believing Jews in that time. **But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.** The winter would make travel more difficult, the Sabbath would prohibit Jewish believers from traveling in that time because they will want to keep Sabbath. Since the Lord Jesus told them to pray this prayer I believe that they will pray this prayer and it will be answered. A further reason for the urgency to get out of Judea is then stated, **For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.** Since there can be only one period of unparalleled difficulty in the world then this passage and the three OT passages which speak of this same time must all refer to the same time. It will be the second half of the tribulation. The difficulty will be so great that verse 22 says **Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.** The words translated **cut short** should be translated "suddenly terminated." The time is set for three and a half years and 2 months in the Book of Daniel, so that will not be shortened, but that time period will come to a sudden halt on the day of the Second Coming. So the word does not mean **cut short**, as if shorter than OT prophecy predicted, but "suddenly terminated." And the point of the verse is that **no life**, meaning **no life** at all on the entire planet, whether human or animal or sea or bird would be left alive if it did not come to a sudden halt. Why? Because the judgments will be so catastrophic that nothing would be left except blood. **But for the sake of the elect**, which here should be translated choice ones, a reference to the Jewish remnant, **for their sake**, those days will be suddenly terminated. How will they be "suddenly terminated?" By the coming of the Son of Man. Verse 23, **then**, that is, in those days of great tribulation, **if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him.** The reason is because the Christ will not come gradually or in a private way, but publicly. It will be obvious. No one will have to disclose His location.

Verse 24 is the explanation, **For false Christ's and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.** There will be false Messiah's and false prophets trying to lead the Jewish remnant astray. They will do **great signs and wonders**, as great and greater than the magicians and sorcerers in Egypt, and yet these will be false signs, their purpose is **to mislead**, to deceive **the elect**, the choice one's hiding in the wilderness, and they are trying to draw them out of their hiding place in the wilderness to destroy them, But they should **not believe.**

Verse 25, **Behold, I have told you in advance.** I have told you so that you will know and that you will keep your eyes on My word and not on great signs and wonders. It's not the great signs and wonders that are so great but it is the word of Christ which is great. I always trump signs and miracles and wonders and the second half of the Tribulation will be full of signs and wonders.

So, verse 26, **if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness, do not go out.** That is, if they say He is near to where you are hiding, do not go out. It may be tempting but do not go out. **Or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them.** That would expose the remnant to the anti-Christ who would kill them. And as long as they believe the word of God and not these lies they will survive until the end. But if they believe these lies they will be killed.

The reason they should not believe these lies is verse 27, **For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.** In other words, when He comes, it will not be gradually and it will not be secretly. It will be sudden and it will be public. He will come like lightning

Verse 28 gives the results, mass carnage. **Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.** When Jesus returns He will do so because Israel has issued the Messianic Greeting of 23:39, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." They will have suffered a defeat in Jerusalem but He will return with great power and glory to destroy His enemies and rescue Israel.

Verses 29-31 describe the Sign of His Coming in answer to the original question of the disciples in verse 3. **But immediately after the tribulation of those days,** not before, not at the end, but **immediately after,** four things will take place. First, a cosmic blackout. **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall** from the sky. So it will be completely black. Zechariah 14:6 called this a thick darkness. Second, **the powers of the heavens will be shaken.** The **powers of the heavens** are the demons. They will know their judgment is soon and they will be defeated and locked away in prison for a thousand years. Third, the sign of His coming. **Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky.** The sign is not noted but since everything will be black it must be some kind of light. Therefore, since the light in the OT was the Shechinah Glory, a visible manifestation of God's presence, the sign will be the Shechinah Glory against the black background. He will appear in the sky. Fourth, the tribes of Israel will be in mourning. **and then the tribes of the earth will mourn.** The word **earth** can be translated "land." Since Zechariah says all the tribes of Israel will mourn, the house of David by itself and the wives by themselves, the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves, then this should be translated "land." **The tribes of the land will mourn.** They will be in mourning relative to their realization of what their nation had done to the King. And after these four things, then **they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.** Their deliverer will come in His kingdom.

24:31 then says, **And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.** Quote from the OT. Where from? Isa 27:13, "It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem." The nation Israel, every last one of them will be gathered. Has nothing to do with the Church and the Rapture. A trumpet means nothing more than to signal an event and you can have trumpets for Israel and trumpets for the Church. The Church isn't even in the picture. This is Israel and her time of trouble and Christ's second coming to rescue Israel from certain annihilation. And besides, at the Rapture there is always resurrection, but this is not a resurrection, this is a gathering of Israel together for judgment. They will be judged in chapter 25:1-30, first of all, for kingdom entrance, and second of all, for reward. And therefore, the disciples question has been answered, what will be the sign of your coming? A bright light against a black background. That is the sign but if you see the sign it is too late. Therefore, next week we begin to see the exhortations to be prepared before, when they see all these things, so that when He comes, they are prepared and will enjoy kingdom entrance.