

The Second Coming of Christ in Biblical Perspective
“What is the Sign of the End of the Age?”
Matthew 24:1-14
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This is our second study on the Second Coming of Christ as we look at what is called the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25. This is the Word of God. Matthew 24:1-14 says, [1] *Jesus left the temple and was going away, when His disciples came to point out to Him the buildings of the temple. [2] But He answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” [3] As He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” [4] And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. [5] For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. [6] And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

[9] “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. [10] And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. [11] And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [12] And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [14] And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord abides forever. May His Word be preached to you.

We started with fear and trembling, yet with excitement and anticipation our study of the second coming. The reason for the five messages on the Olivet Discourse is because the Lord laid on my heart to preach the book of Revelation, but the problem with preaching the book of Revelation is that so many of us come to the book of Revelation with our minds cluttered by so many schemes concerning the second coming of Christ. There seem to be so many questions about the second coming of Christ that I thought the best thing to do, honestly, before we went to the Book of Revelation, was to kind of clear the clutter from one of our Lord's sermons that was directly dealing with the issues that are upon our heart. We will seek not to fall short of that text. We will seek not to go beyond that text, and we will seek to understand that text.

I want to give you very briefly, some key points that you need to have in the back of your mind as we come to this study. Concerning the second coming of Christ in the Bible, there are three key words that you always want to be on the lookout for. I want to give them to you in Greek first. The first is Parousia which is translated the coming of the Lord or His coming or His presence. It's the idea of the coming presence of royalty – the glorious royal coming of the Lord. We see it in this Matthew 24 text when His disciples asked Him, ‘What is the sign of Your Parousia, Your coming?’ It is the major term in the Bible used to refer to the second coming of Christ.

The second word is the word epiphany which means an appearance, a bright, radiant, a majestic appearance, a glorious appearance. This is kind of what the writer of Hebrews is talking about when he says ‘the Son is the radiance of His glory’ (Hebrews 1:3), that He is the perfect expression of the glory of our God, the stamp, the image, veiled in flesh. This is what John 1:14 is speaking of, when it says [14] *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* It is His appearance, His bright radiance. We've already had one epiphany – the first Advent, and there is yet another epiphany – the second appearance of our Savior, the second Advent.

The third key word is apocalypse. It means a revelation – the revelation of Christ or the sudden manifestation of Christ. This is a key word in the book of Revelation itself. These are the three key words that you will want to keep before you as you can pretty well see the English translations. When you see those English words, then you kind of know the Greek words that are behind them that become very technical terms in the New Testament.

In the last study we also established some essentials concerning the second coming of Christ. These are the non-negotiables but we are going to be appropriately agnostic when we need to. I will have to tell you sometimes that I don't know. Here are the things I know about the second coming of Christ that we substantiated in the Bible in the last study. The first thing is that the coming of Christ is personal and will be a real event in time and history. As Jesus was taken up, the angel said, ‘You shall see Him coming in like manner just as He went up’ (Acts 1:11). The second coming of Christ is the reversal of the historical ascension of Christ 2000 years ago.

The second thing we learned is that the coming of Christ is universal, invisible. There doesn't seem to be a whole lot of room for some of the current teaching of a secret second coming of Christ that people don't see but the church gets removed. What I see in the Bible continually with the word Parousia, apocalypse, and epiphany, as it refers to the coming of Christ, there doesn't seem to be any secret about it at all. It says ‘Every eye shall see Him whom they have pierced’ (Revelation 1:7).

Third thing we noticed about the second coming of Christ is that it will be sudden and unexpected for unbelievers. It will come suddenly and unexpectedly, like lightning, like a thief in the night. But the same text in I Thessalonians 4 and 5 tells us that it may be sudden and unexpected for the children of darkness, but for the believer, we are not like them. For us, it will be anticipated and expected. The believer is not into date setting. Don't know d-day or h-hour, but we are looking forward to it. Believers will be looking for the blessed hope, anticipating its actual occurrence.

We also noted that the second coming of Christ is certain, but undated. We don't know the date, but we know it's appointed. It is appointed unto men once to die and then the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Finally, it is decisive and final. The coming of Christ ushers in the end of the age, the coming of Christ ushers in the rolling up of the heavens and the earth with fire. The coming of Christ ushers in a new heavens and a new earth. The coming of Christ ushers in the rule and reign of Christ forever in that Kingdom of perfect righteousness established. That's what we covered about the essentials.

In this study, what did Jesus say to the disciples in this question from Matthew 24? The question the disciples asked Jesus in Matthew 24:3 was, “*Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?*” That question has a presupposition behind it. Follow me on this. We cannot understand Matthew 24 and 25 without

understanding the question and you can't understand the question unless you put it into the context itself. Here are some questions to think about and answer from the text. What is the context and what are the key points of the question? What presupposition is in the minds of the disciples when they asked the question, 'Tell us when will these things be, what will be the sign of Your coming and what will be the sign of the end of the age'?

The first thing I want you to see is that this presupposition is attached to the previous discourse in Matthew 23. There are, in fact, six discourses of our Lord in the Scriptures that we refer to as three major ones and three minor ones. The discourse in Matthew 23 Jesus made a key statement, for the key to what His Disciples are asking in Chapter 24 is at the conclusion of His discourse and sermon in Chapter 23. In Matthew 23 Jesus comes to a section that we call His concluding lament. He has just brought judgment upon Pharisaism, wayward Judaism, and Israel. Then He brings a lament in Matthew 23:37-39 saying [37] "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!* [38] *See, your house (the disciples would immediately think of the temple, the House of Israel, God's House) is left to you desolate (empty).* [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.'*" That's how He concluded the sermon. So this discourse sets up Matthew 24.

Secondly, the Disciples then respond to that. As Jesus finishes this discourse, we see in Matthew 24:1 that He is leaving the temple. The word means a physical leaving of the temple. As He is going out of the temples, the Disciples are responding to that statement by pointing out the temple, saying 'Desolate?' The first thing that people look for when they come to this side of the country is this temple. Herod's refurbishing of the second temple that was built in the days of Nehemiah, Ezra and Haggai had one gate, 180 feet high that was gold and silver plated. It would shine the gold plating in the roof and white marble was all around it. One block in the temple of white marble weighs 100 to 120 tons. "You're saying this thing's going to be desolate?" Now they probably didn't say it that way but that was their response as Jesus is walking out of the temple.

Jesus then gives them an answer to the response of His Disciples. Jesus answers them in Matthew 24:2 which says [2] *But He answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."* I've had the privilege to go to Israel now as either seven or eight times. A couple of times we've been allowed down into the deepest recesses where they call the Wailing Wall, the Western Wall. As you go down to the deepest recesses, there are these glass panels that you can look through, and you actually see the base – the 120 ton stones all jumbled on top of each other, like an earthquake. As I looked at these stones I realized I was looking at fulfilled prophecy, where our Lord, for decades before it happened, said 'not one stone will be left standing.'

In other words, Jesus response is, 'I told you back there in that sermon, this temple is going to be desolate. But I didn't tell you the whole story for it's going to be utterly destroyed. See these white marble stones you stand in amazement at and still to this day wonder, how did you get 120 ton stones on top of each other? They're not even going to be on top of each other. They're going to be utterly destroyed.' Now what happens is you need to step back for they've left the temple and in Matthew 24:3 they're on the Mount of Olives.

So they've gone out of the Eastern gate. They've gone down the side of the hill over the Kidron Brook, to the left is the valley of Jehoshaphat and to the right is the Valley of the Kings, where Abraham met Melchizedek and set down to wine and bread. This is where He begins to

climb the Mount of Olives. This is Tuesday evening of Holy Week. He would have gone past the Garden of Gethsemane as He arrives at the Mount of Olives and notice it says He took His seat or He sat on the Mount of Olives. Now, that's significant for two reasons. One is He is taking the position of a Rabbi and when the people would gather for worship, as soon as the priest or the prophet would walk in and open the scriptures, the people would stand. The scriptures would be read, they would keep standing and the preacher would sit. How did we get this thing messed up? I don't know. The Rabbi would take his seat, the seat of teaching and the people would stand out of respect, not necessarily the rabbi, but the Word of God being taught to receive it.

There's something more that's happening here. There is so much here but I want to show you one thing that's happening here. A couple of summers ago, we did a summer series on Haggai, the prophet. The people were looking at the temple and saying, 'This is nothing like Solomon's Temple. Where is the glory of the temple?' The Lord says, through Haggai, Zechariah and other prophets, "You think that Solomon's temple was glory? Don't despise a day of small things. This temple will be filled with an even greater glory than Solomon's Temple.' Then I taught you what that was speaking of, because the Shekinah glory never fell into the holy of holies in the Second Temple for it was speaking of the day when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into that temple – the glory of God entered into it. The Bible prophesied the glory of the Lord would enter that temple in a way that it had never entered when the Word became flesh and would be held His glory (John 1:14). That was the fulfillment of that.

The Word of God also prophesies that the glory of the Lord will depart from the temple. That prophecy is found in Ezekiel 11. A New Covenant is going to be established that is described Ezekiel 11:14 and here we find out what will happen to the Old Covenant and the Old Covenant people. Ezekiel 11:22-23 says [22] *Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. [23] And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.*

What is Ezekiel telling us here? There is coming a day when the Lord will do a new work in a New Covenant and His glory will come from the city and depart from it, and will rest on the mountain east of the city and look upon it. What mountain is east of the city? It is the Mount of Olives. Who is the glory of the Lord? It is Jesus. He arises, leaves the temple, leaves the city, and in fulfillment of Ezekiel, takes His seat upon the Mount of Olives and looks back on to that city. Here are a couple of more things about the presupposition behind this question in Matthew 24 and it is to look at the question itself.

This question appears to be one question but when you look at it closely, it's really three questions. I'm not sure if Judas Iscariot was actually with them at this moment or not, but if he was, all 12 didn't speak in unison. The Bible tells us there are two parallel texts to Matthew 24 and 25. It's Mark 13 and Luke 21 and in the parallel text it tells us that the disciples are now about to get a private sermon. In Matthew 24:3 it says 'He said to them privately' and this is where He gives them the sixth discourse that follows the fifth discourse of the lament over Jerusalem. This discourse is a private discourse, and it is a response to the question that four of the disciples asked Him. The four disciples that ask Him this question, according to Mark, is Peter, James, John and Andrew – the two sets of brothers. They specifically are asking what is now in the mind of every one of these disciples.

Matthew 24:3 says [3] *As He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of*

Your coming and of the end of the age?” What are these things? It is the desolation and destruction of the temple. Now just take the phrase, ‘the sign of your coming’ also goes with the phrase ‘the end of the age.’ What is the presupposition behind the disciples’ really three questions? Their presupposition is; if this temple is being desolated and destroyed, then that means it's the end of the age and the royal reign of the Messiah. In their minds, that destruction must have tied to it the reign of Christ, the reign of the Messiah and the end of the age. Now Jesus privately begins to teach them in response to that threefold question and the presupposition that's behind it.

As He begins to teach them, I want to give you a second thing. The presupposition is, and then followed by the pastoral concern of Christ. This is important. Matthew 24:4-5 says [4] *And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. [5] For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.* Jesus shows a concern for their presupposition which reveals within them and inevitable weakness and what's that? That is a curiosity as to what is the sign of the end of the age and that is a weakness. When that curiosity is driving them, that means they are then set up for the inevitable onslaught of false christs, false teachers and false teaching. Jesus says not if but there will come people in My name but it's not Him and they will not only use that against you, but they will use other events and try to tell you those will be the signs of the end of the age. This will be used to mislead them.

The third thing about His pastoral concern is that their presupposition that the destruction of the temple is immediately tied to the second coming and to the end of the age shows the vulnerability of God's people as sign seekers and the culpability of false teachers who take advantage of that vulnerability. In fact, I confess I played on that vulnerability in this study by the sermon title I used – what is the sign of the end of the age? We all want to know. Is it the configuration of Europe into the Union of Europe? Is it the horn from the east and who is that horn from the east? We all have this curiosity that makes us vulnerable to the culpability of false teachers, because we have become instead of Jesus seekers, sign seekers. The attending pitfalls of sorcery, evil spirits and false teaching is always lurking right underneath the ground level of God's people and their heart. Jesus, first of all, in His pastoral concern, wants to disabuse them of their vulnerability of false teachers taking advantage of their curiosity for signs. So the first thing He does is instead of answering the sign of His coming and the sign of the end of the age, He tells them what's not the sign of the end of the age.

That brings us to the third section which is His prophetic answer. I feel so good about everything I've said to you so far and now I am just going to jump into the abyss because over here is my brother R.C. Sproul, with his preterist view that says everything has already been fulfilled in 78 days – the coming of the Lord in glory, everything. Then there are those with a futurist view that nothing's been done in Matthew 24 and 25. It's all out there right before Jesus comes back. Then there is the right view, which is it is both preterist and futurist that the destruction of the temple, all these things is being used by Jesus to tell us of something in the future that it foreshadows, that it points to.

The tough thing is you never know for the next two chapters immediately, which one He is talking about – all these things or the sign of the second coming of the end of the age. Sometimes it looks like He's talking about the end of the age when He's actually talking about the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D which has been done. Then sometimes the language around what's happening to the temple is being used to tell you what's going to happen at the end, for there will be a tribulation in 70 A.D. and there's a great tribulation before Jesus comes.

Working our way through this is going to require carefulness. Whether it's a-millennial friends or my pre millennials friends or my post millennials friends or my pan millennials – those who think things will pan out in the end, I refuse to take the schemes to go to the text.

I really believe with all my heart, one of the keys for your Christian life is to start with the Bible. Come to the theology of the Bible, then develop your philosophy of life and ministry from your theology that comes from the Bible. Most of us adopt a philosophy of life and then try to proof text it with the Bible. This is Jesus' big sermon on the second coming so I'm in the right area. What I don't want to do is read my scheme that I'm already committed to back into it. What I'd like to do is start with it and whenever I'm at that point, I become an exegetical slave. What I mean is I want to pull out from the Scripture and try to find the key in the Scripture, not in my predisposed scheme and when I look at the Scripture, I always look for the grammatical cues.

The grammatical cue for Matthew 24 and 25 is the question that Jesus answers given to Him in Matthew 24:3 – when will these things happen, what is the sign of Your coming and what is the sign of the end of the age? From Matthew 24 and 25, in three sections He is going to continually talk about the destruction of the temple, but as He does it, He's going to answer these three questions. From those three questions, Jesus will take the last one to answer first so He reverses them.

He answers the question what is the sign of the end of the age in Matthew 24:4-14 and the clue is given in the phrase from verse 14 that says 'then the end will come.' There's the giveaway. The first 14 verses are handling the third part of the question 'What is the sign of the end of the age?' Then the end will come and even though He's talking about the destruction of the temple Matthew 24:15-31 are designed to answer the second part of the question 'What is the sign of Your coming?' Matthew 24:30 says [30] *Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

Then Matthew 24:32-35 answer the first question, 'When will these things take place? When will these things be?' Matthew 24:34 says [34] *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.* Then we'll get to Matthew 24:36-41 and then the various parables that give us life takeaways in light of the second coming of Christ. Now let's go back to Matthew 24:1-14. The key to the text is the question – when is the sign of the end of the age?

The second thing that He says is the temple destruction is not the end of the age, but it is a type or a foreshadowing of the end. Their presupposition was that when this temple is destroyed, then the end of the age and the coming of Christ must be directly related to it but Christ says 'No, there is a relationship, it is a foreshadowing for there are things that are happening there that give the picture of what will happen then, but it is not immediately the sign of it or immediately tied to it.'

Another thing that He's says here is that because of your fascination with signs, in the end of the age, there will be people that will use misleading signs, but the misleading signs, while they're not the signs of the end of the age, they are birth pangs. There are six of these misleading signs or birth pangs. What are they? Here's the first one. There will be violent political upheavals. Matthew 24:5-7a says [5] *For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. [6] And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. [7a] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...*

The first thing He says is false teachers are going to capture you, teaching you about the end of the age and they will do it by wars and rumors of wars. The amazing thing is, the very thing Jesus warns us about, we all line up to go hear some preacher preach it. Some preachers start telling us the wars that are happening are the sign of the end of the age and Jesus just told you, it's not for wars and rumors of wars are not the sign of the end of the age. That's a misleading sign that false teachers will use to capture your curiosity and get you distracted from what you're supposed to be doing for Jesus. That's the way a broken world is, but then Jesus says it's not a sign, but it is a birth pain. It is a sharp pain that tells you God is going to deliver us from this misery to something glorious and great. It's a twinge that's telling us God's delivering us to something greater.

The second misleading sign is natural catastrophes, famines and earthquakes. From the days of the flood of Noah on, there have been famines, earthquakes and upheavals here. That is not the sign of the end of the age. I don't care how many times CNN shows you the picture, but let me tell you what it is. It is a birth pain. It's one more statement that this world is groaning, wanting to be delivered to a new heavens and a new earth.

The third birth pain will be persecution against the church. They will kill you. All the nations will at one time or another, be devoted to killing you and they will deliver you up. Matthew 24:8-9 says *[8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. [9] Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.* The persecution of the church is not the sign of the end of the age. It has been persecuted from day one – Stephen, James, Paul, Peter, all of the disciples and then throughout the ages. It's not the sign of the end of the age, but it is a birth pain and God will not leave His people's blood unavenged, for they cry out, 'Oh Lord, how long?' (Revelation 6:10).

A fourth birth pain is apostasy and treachery in the professing church. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. As I look at the numbers and the memberships of churches, I wonder what is the real number? As time goes on, the true believer perseveres to the end. It's not his perseverance that saves him, but his perseverance shows his salvation. The false believer like Simon the magician, falls away. Like the rocky soil hearer burns up, like the thorny ground hearer gets choked out, that there will be many who will fall away. They'll turn on each other, but apostasy and treachery, the professing church did not just happen. It happened right among the 12 disciples, with Judas Iscariot himself. That's not the sign of the end of the age, but it is a birth pain whereby we long for the day when the church will be pure and holy, delivered up to glory in Christ.

A fifth birth pain is there will be false prophets and false teaching. I believe we're in the biggest onslaught of false prophets and false teaching we have ever had since the 100 years prior to the Reformation. I believe this experience-oriented and based Christianity that denies the call of the mind and the heart to Christ is leading many people astray. There are in fact false prophets and false teaching, but that's not the sign of the end of the age for the church has been plagued by false prophets within her pale from day one, yet we look to the Lord for that day where righteousness will reign.

A sixth birth pain from the text and misleading sign that people will use is lawlessness. Matthew 24:12 says *[12] And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.* Isn't that interesting? How many of you have been taught or at least it's indicated to you that whenever the Law of God is developed within the Church, that hardens the heart of God's people? The law of God can't save you. It can't keep you saved. There is no power to it whatsoever, but the law of the Lord teaches us how to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and

mind and to love our neighbor as ourself. It's the Divine directives of the attributes of God, of holy love and whenever lawlessness abounds in society, love will disappear – every man for himself. Lawlessness comes to a society, when lawlessness comes to the church. O, Lord, how I love thy law. Its precepts cannot save me, but they are a light unto my life. I now know why Jesus said, 'If you love Me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15) for lawlessness brings disorder, chaos and destructiveness in a society.

Then with all of this falling away and all of these warnings, what is the evidence the individual being really saved? The evidence is that the one who is saved endures to the end. Matthew 24:13 says *[13] But the one who endures to the end will be saved.* So, it's not the endurance that saves you. Endurance is the evidence that a new heart is there. Even though all of this brokenness that I've just described is in the world, and these birth pangs are striking, looking to the day of the coming of the Lord and the end of the age, what are God's people doing? God's people are walking in grace and persevering to the end because of His preserving grace that won't let go of our heart and our soul. What a glorious picture of God's people kept by the truth in the Holy Spirit with their heart and mind fixed upon Jesus, the Author and Perfector of their faith. That's the believer in the midst of all of this.

Remember this; prophecy in the Bible is not for curiosity, it is for behavior to keep us focused. God gives us the information we need, and that's what He does here. He is giving us this so we won't be misled by false teachers. These aren't the signs of the end of the age. They are birth pains so what is the sign of the end of the age? He gives it to us right here. Matthew 24:14 says *[14] And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* The end is coming when the Gospel has been preached to the world as defined by our God. When His glory has been declared as a testimony from the rising to the setting of the sun and how we have seen this for 2000 years as the whole world has been turned upside down by their preaching (Acts 17:6). As Jesus has tarried, we have seen that Gospel go from the East to the West and encircle the whole globe, and now north to south. Now we know what precedes the end of the age.

Here are some takeaways from this study. Number one is, respond to Christ's pastoral concern in these verses from Matthew 24. Don't let prophecy teaching become a curiosity fascination. Don't let people take the very signs that He says they will use to mislead you and mislead you away from the behavior He calls for you to have, which is perseverance to the end, which is preaching the Gospel to the world here. Don't be misled by false teachers (prophecy teachers).

Number two is misleading signs are not signs, they're birth pains. Here are what birth pains are, not that I've had experience, I have just been around it. I know this about birth pains. Birth pains are insistent, they are consistent and they intensify. That's what these things will do. These signs have been with us for we've had wars, famines, earthquakes, false teachers, loss, apostasy, treachery, etc., but as long as Jesus tarries from the day that He comes and as long as the end of the age has not come, you will find these birth pains, like all birth pains, they will keep intensifying. So, in the days of Jesus, there weren't any wars but there was Pax Romana within four decades and just in Rome, there would be so many insurrections and revolts that by the time 80 A.D. comes, four emperors will arise to take the throne of Rome in one year. There are barbarians, then wars and so wars have continued, but they kept intensifying. In the last 300 years there have been 300 wars just in Europe. In this last century more people died in violent wars than have ever died in all wars together up until this century. That's not the sign of the end

of the age but as long as Jesus carries those birth pains will intensify – earthquakes, famines, the brokenness of the world, apostasy, false teaching, etc.

The third takeaway is the relationship of the temporal destruction to the end of the age. It was not the end of the age like they presupposed. What has to happen? The temple is going to be destroyed. When was it destroyed? It was destroyed in 70 A.D.. What has to happen? The Gospel has got to be preached to all the nations. Jesus is communicating to us that there is a span of time here. Yes, the temple destruction is foreshadowing, but it is not the sign of the end of the age, the coming of Christ, but that the Gospel has got to be preached to all the nations. I don't mean this laughingly, but us Christians have to get killed by all the nations and that's going to take some time for that spreading tribulation, for that spreading persecution. So Jesus disabuses them of that notion that the destruction of the temple is the signal that the end of the age and the coming of Christ is there.

The fourth takeaway is that the necessity of a time span is there, but remember the call of Jesus twice in the text that no man knows the hour or the time. That's not our business. Our business is to keep preaching the Gospel and endure to the end, by the grace of God for the glory of God.

The fifth takeaway is whenever we approach prophecy, this text and the resulting verses that have yet to be studied, let's always do it with prayer and humility as we walk our way through the Bible identifying the essentials.

The sixth takeaway is that the prophetic Word is to prepare you and encourage you not to indulge our curiosity. Endure to the end, preach the Gospel to the world.

Number seven, is missions and hastening the coming of the Lord. Have you ever thought about that? When we send missionaries out, Peter says in II Peter 3:12 that we are hastening the coming of the Lord. Now, that doesn't mean we're changing the date on the Lord but we already saw that before Jesus comes again, the Gospel must be preached to all the nations. Think about that the next time you start praying about faith promise giving, a short term missions trip and sending out a missionary – we're hastening the end of the age, the coming of the Lord for the Gospel must be preached to all the nations. All these other things are fascinating and I know people will point them to you saying "This is it..." but I'm telling you, it's a misleading sign. It's a birth pain, but it's not the sign. That's just a broken world.

These signs just keep intensifying. There was an earthquake out of Charleston in the 1800s. Dr. Frank Barker and I both had a dear friend who pastored in Waynesboro, Georgia. His name was Jimmy Knight. There's a sign in downtown Waynesboro that is right in front of a house. In the 1880s, that house used to be a house of ill repute. There was this dear African-American saint that would walk by this house every single day, and say, "Lord, save them or judge them" and she'd go on by. She was walking by this house the day the tremor from that 1886 earthquake in Charleston ran right up there, and all the natural gas lights begin to explode. That house began to shake up there on that hill and people are running out of their in all manner of clothing and un-clothing. She looked up and saw the house shaking and felt everything going on and said, "Oh, Lord, shake them one more time for they ain't heard you yet."

The Lord uses the catastrophes. He uses the wars. He uses all of these things that are a result of a broken world as birth pains to say, 'O God, deliver us to the age to come.' The sign that I'm looking to is your endurance in Christ to the end, preaching the Gospel to all the nations to the end. That's where Jesus has brought us as we anticipate the end of the age. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the Lord Jesus, our Savior. Thank You for the privilege to serve Him, know Him and love Him. O thank You for this enormous privilege we have to study Your Word. Help us not to come short or to go beyond, but to be faithful to it. Now, Holy Spirit, bear witness with the hearts of Your people those things that are true and lead us from faith to faith and victory to victory. Any reading this today who don't know that Savior, would You awaken within them a desire to be carried into the age to come, in the arms of grace, of the Lord Jesus, who died for their sins? If you would like someone to pray with you about this decision, please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we'd love to talk and pray with you about this life changing decision. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.