

Beth was a friend of my college roommate. She had a very timid / quiet personality... one might even say that Beth was a very **shy** person. Imagine my surprise when (after I graduated seminary and went to my first church) I saw that Beth was one of our missionaries. As a single lady... she was called to Cameron with Wycliffe Bible Translators. She travelled among the Masaji tribes to interview them and determine how many translations of the Bible were needed to reach them. (Of all the people that I have ever met... Beth would be one of the LAST people I would expect to see in such a ministry.)

Patti and I have supported Beth over the last 35 years... and during that time... we watched her meet Ed who she married in the late 80's. ... FOUR weeks ago... Ed and Beth came to our home for a visit. Beth was in the kitchen with Patti preparing dinner... while Ed and I sat on a couch talking.

It seemed rather random... (no obvious link to what we were discussing)... as Ed (out of the blue) interjected into our conversation: *"I am not one of those Christians who get so excited saying 'we are living in the end times!' I am not at all one of those who get so happy... Yea! Earthquakes... and wars... and pestilence'... people are going to suffer and die!... Oh Happy Day!"* ... (I do not know if Ed was aware that he was mocking ME... because I **AM** excited that we are living in the last days. The way that Ed spoke... it seemed to me that Ed believes the ridiculous notion that excited "Prophecy Watchers" have to be thrilled about human suffering because of the horrible catastrophes that correspond with the end times.

I thought... "what an unfair characterization of those of us who take to heart passages of Scripture... like the one we come to today... in our study

through Luke...” I think this passage will excite you. It should. But I am confident (unlike Ed) that you can be excited about the days we are living in (right now) **BECAUSE Jesus is about to return** – without being *giddy* that people are (right now) and will more intensely experience catastrophic terror on earth and in the heavens.

After studying the passage for this message – I am more excited than ever... because it makes it so **clear** that these **are** the last days... and Jesus is about to return for us! I have so much that I want to say... that there is just **NO WAY** that I can cover it in just one week. So today will be part **one** of the message: “*The End Times According to Jesus*”... and next week will be part **two**. ... Our verses today (and next week) in Luke... bring us to what is called “*the Olivet Discourse*.” Matthew... Mark... and Luke (all three) record this discussion that Jesus had with His disciples... and all three bring out different **nuances** of that discussion.

Apparently some of it took place right after Jesus and His men finished people-watching as people gave to the Temple treasury. Remember last week (?)... when Jesus spoke highly of the poor widow for giving her two mites – all that she had... And then another part of the discussion took place after they left the Temple and stood on the Mt. of Olives... looking back at the very OPULENT Temple... glistening in all her glory below them.

The Olivet Discourse has been the subject of more scholarly debate than perhaps **any other passage in the Gospels**. The fact is... we have yet to find a scholar who can perfectly unravel the knotty problems of the Olivet Discourse... to everyone’s satisfaction. Study of it... and preaching on it... requires a proper humility and a willingness to admit that we may not have all the correct understanding. But today (and next week) I will give you **my**

studied interpretation – which differs from many believers (who have also studied it... and who happen to be - a lot smarter than me.)

So let's get started! ... Most of the Olivet Discourse (expressed in our passage – Luke 21:5-38)... concerns the end times... as they are **foreshadowed** by the destruction of Jerusalem (which happened in 70 A.D.) ... Jesus warned His disciples about this awful catastrophe – that was about to happen. It was going to be a judgment of unimaginable chaos... terror... and death... on 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel... because they rejected their Messiah. This was about to happen (some 40 years after Jesus' death) and Jesus wanted to warn His disciples (some of whom would see it.) ... But even **worse**... was a different judgment of reigning-down-terror that would be in the distant future. This one would happen just before Jesus' return to earth.

Both judgments have similarities – but the second one will be more intense. (You are about to hear how horrible the first judgment was – the destruction of Jerusalem – but the second one will be far WORSE!) Jesus warns His followers about both.

The Olivet Discourse gets a little confusing as Jesus presents various signs for both of these judgements... and scholars cannot all agree about which signs go with one judgment or the other. ... Are “*wars and rumors of wars*” a sign for you and I to take notice? Or was this only for the men listening to Jesus on the mountain that day? ...And how (exactly) is it a meaningful sign – since we have always had them? What about pestilence...? What about earthquakes...?

Most scholars would probably agree that the Book of Revelation gives signs about the judgment – just before Christ returns to earth. We read about them happening during the period known as the Tribulation. The signs that are given in the Olivet Discourse ARE REPEATED in Revelation chapter six – however they are intensified. (Rev. 6:1-2) – there will be false messiahs. (Rev 6:3-4) – there will be wars... (Rev. 6:5-6) – famines... (Rev. 6:7-8) – death... (Rev. 6:9-11) – martyrs... (Rev. 6:12-17) – extensive chaos.

We will see that Jesus seems to give these as signs leading up to the fall of Jerusalem (the first judgment.) ... But do the signs (necessarily) have to be for only one judgment or the other...? ... No! In fact... that is the way prophecy often worked. The prophecy would often point to an event that happened with 100 years of when it was given... and also much further down the road in history. The prophecy about Christ being born of a virgin in Isaiah 7:14 is an example of this. ... The latter fulfilment was always an even stronger sign.

So... that is the way I am interpreting the Olivet Discourse. I am understanding it the way that is consistent with the way that we see Bible prophecy works. These signs we are about to read from the Olivet Discourse... point to the destruction of Jerusalem **AND** will also occur just before Jesus returns to earth. But when they occur again – they will be more intense. ... Yes we have always had wars and rumors of wars... yes we have always had earthquakes... yes we have always had disease and pestilence... BUT they serve as a sign – when we see them increase in number and intensity.

Look with me now at a piece of this discourse... that we will cover next week. But I am showing it to you now... because it is a repeated sign in the same discourse... that Jesus intensifies. He mentioned this as a sign of Jerusalem's destruction... and then He mentioned it again (but more intense) as a sign of His return. Here (now) are some signs of His return...

**Luke 21:25-27 (ESV)**

*<sup>25</sup> “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, <sup>26</sup> people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

(Again) verse 27... *And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.* There can be no doubt about where we should place **this** intensified sign. It is part of the judgment just before Jesus returns.

(Now notice) how this same sign was given earlier... less intensely.

**Luke 21:11-12 (ESV)**

*<sup>11</sup> There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.*

*<sup>12</sup> But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.*

Signs in the heavens and on earth will create tremendous chaos... but notice how it will be even greater chaos (people fainting with fear with foreboding – according to verse 26) just before Jesus returns. ... So let me summarize how I believe we are to understand the signs that Jesus gives in the Olivet Discourse. All of the signs we are about to read - point to **both** judgments – but they will **intensify** as signs... in order to point to the time of

Christ's second coming gets closer. (As we will see next week) we are to use these intensified signs... in the same way people can tell summer is coming... by observing a fig tree.

The occasion for the Olivet Discourse was his disciples' admiration of the temple.

### **Luke 21:5-6**

There was no exaggeration in this. The temple was considered one of the great wonders of the Roman world. It had been under reconstruction for forty-six years and was nearing completion... which would come in A.D. 63. Ironically a mere seven years after it was completed... it was completely destroyed (just as Jesus predicted.)

This was not the temple of Solomon. The Babylonian army destroyed THAT Temple in the seventh century B.C. ... The temple that was being admired in Jesus' day was the one built by Ezra. Herod added and enlarged Ezra's Temple to twice the size that it had been.

The disciples said: "*Look at this temple, the riches in it, the valuable stones in its construction!*" The wealth was impressive. ... The Roman historian Tacitus reported that it was a place of immense wealth. The building and the gates were overlaid with pure gold... silver... and jeweled sculptures.

One of the most famous sculptures on the Temple... was a solid gold grapevine bearing a cluster of grapes that were the size of a man. ... The way the Jews covered the outside of the building with gold was by using massive plates of gold attached to the building. When the sun would rise in the morning... these huge heavy golden plates would reflect the rays of the

sun... forcing anyone looking at the Temple to look away... because it was as radiant as the sun.

The stones of the Temple were massive... (77 ft. long)... 9 ft. wide... 12 ft. high). They were the size of a boxcar on a modern-day train... and each weighed hundreds of tons. The beautiful white marble pillars were 40 feet high... each one carved from a single solid stone.

The breath-taking size and beauty of the Temple made it into a true wonder! So... the idea of the Temple being destroyed was most difficult for Jesus' disciples to believe. ... But did they really see it? ... Its magnificence would soon be gone. ... It would soon lie in rubble... not one stone left upon another. ... (And) that is the way you and I should see any of man's accomplishments and all the wealth of this world. It won't be here long - it will ALL eventually pass away.

Mark's gospel tells us that some of the disciples were so astounded by Jesus' prophecy that they brought the matter up (again) to Jesus... once they got to the Mt. of Olives (Mark 13:3.)

History records exactly HOW RIGHT Jesus was. This beautiful temple would be torn apart stone by stone by stone. This is exactly what happened in 70 A.D. The Roman legion under the command of General Titus besieged Jerusalem.

Sometime after Jesus spoke this prophecy... the Roman yoke became more and more oppressive than ever before. ... Action produced reaction... with the result that Jewish hatred of their heathen oppressors rose to the point of organized rebellion. The fervor of the Zealots against Rome spread over and soon dominated Jewish society... which got the attention of

Rome. Emperor Nero sent his general (Vespasian) to Galilee... who quickly re-established Roman dominance. ... But... trouble was brewing back in Rome... and Vespasian had to return immediately. The Roman Emperor (Nero) ended up committing suicide... and the conquest of Galilee was short-lived. A period of confusion followed in Rome... with four emperors in one year. ... The Jews took advantage of this situation... so that the rebellion began to make some headway again. ... But then Vespasian... who had (by then) rose to become emperor... sent his son Titus back to Israel to restore the order. Titus went directly to Jerusalem with a large army.

The siege began in April of the year A.D. 70... while Jerusalem was still filled with Passover pilgrims. ... The details of the terror that ensued was recorded for us by Josephus.

After a siege of about five months the Romans finally overwhelmed the entire city. ... According to Josephus conditions became so bad (as the Roman's force-starved them)... that people (inside the sealed-walls of Jerusalem... turned into cannibals. Jerusalem's citizens turned on each other. Bands of criminals roamed the streets looking for food. Death was everywhere because of starvation... and pestilence overtook many – because of the sanitation problem of piles and piles of dead bodies in the streets.

After conditions got so bad inside the city... the Romans were easily able to run into the city and take whatever they wanted. (They just had to wait long enough.) ... General Titus commanded his army to leave the temple untouched. He respected it as a wonder of the world. But someone did not get the memo... or ignored it... so it was burnt and it was dismantled. ...

As the Temple burned... the fire got so hot that the gold melted and ran into the cracks of the stones. Roman soldiers who wanted to loot as much gold as they could (as part of their pay for serving in the Roman army) toppled every stone to scrape gold from it.

The war was inexcusably cruel. By the thousands aged men, women, regardless of their physical condition... and even little children were murdered. Some of the prisoners were subsequently thrown to the wild beasts... others were sold into slavery “into all the nations”... while a select number of the strongest and best-looking captives were given to the conquerors as slaves. Before it was all over... 1,100,000 died... and 97,000 were taken into captivity. After this – the Jews would never again have the land of Caanan as their own – until May 12, 1948. (I will have more to say about this REMARKABLE event next week.)

Jews were banished from Israel on pain of death. Jerusalem was made a pagan city. A Temple to the Roman god – Jupiter - was built on the Temple site. In A.D. 135 Roman hatred for the Jews was still so strong that (then) Emperor Hadrien attempted to completely wipe out and erase all memory of the Jewish race... from history. Part of his effort in doing so was to re-name the land of Israel. Hadrien renamed Israel as “Palestine.” (**That** is how that name came to be. He used a derivative of the name of the Jew’s ancient enemies – the Philistines. That was like spitting in their face.) The people who Hadrien relocated to that land were to be called “Palestinians.”

The news media today has free reign to make up their own facts – because the typical American does not know history. The media gets away with portraying the Jews of today as evil aggressors who are trying to push Palestinians out of the land that the Palestinians had first.

It is all related to the Bible prophecy that we are reading in the Olivet Discourse. (Of course... you and I are looking at it from the perspective of *history*.) ... This was all horrible! ... Jesus' disciples knew that the Temple's destruction **WOULD** be... and they had natural concerns and questions. Jesus answers their questions with allusions to an even MORE horrifying judgment was would come thousands of years later.

### **Luke 21:7**

The disciples equated the destruction of the Temple as *the end of the world*. It makes sense that they *would* – but only if we understand what it means to be a Jew. ... To the typical Jew... the Temple and their system of worship meant *everything* to them. By the time of Jesus' day... there is no comprehension of life without it. ... The Temple and its worship was at the center of their whole universe. To do away with it would demolish all that they know and value. It held the meaning of life for them.

Jesus knows their despondency in equating the destruction of the Temple with the end of the world – so He discusses BOTH (at the same time) - but as separate events. One will come much later. (However) both of these events are dealing with God's judgments... and both have startling... petrifying... similar characteristics and signs leading up to them.

### **Luke 21:8-11**

Jesus now proceeds to correct his disciples' mistaken inference that the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world are the same. He shows them that "not everything that seems to be a sign of the end of the world is in reality such a sign." ... To be sure... the events that He points out have significance. ... They are steppingstones leading to the final goal. By

means of them the end of the age is both foreshadowed and brought closer... and God's eternal plan is being carried forward. But we must also consider something that Matthew wrote about this in his presentation of this same conversation of Jesus with His disciples.

**Matthew 24:33 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> *So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.*

Matthew's wording seems to indicate that all these disturbances will eventually happen closer and close to each other. Their occurrences will become more frequent... as Jesus' return gets closer.

Jesus acknowledged the inevitability of false alarms before the "terrors and great signs from heaven." So-called messiahs will continue to emerge, wars will be fought, and unrest will ebb and flow like always. These events are part of the normal chaos associated with the dominion of evil; they do not necessarily signal the beginning of end-time events. And, unfortunately, Christians will not be immune. Believers will not only suffer misfortune like everyone else, but they will also become targets of persecution—even martyrdom.

Still... "the end does not follow immediately." Nations will go to war... disasters will strike... diseases will afflict... and then... eventually... an accelerated number of supernatural events will occur. We don't have time to look at them all – but so many Old Testament Prophecies say the same thing – the occurrences will accelerate. (Isa. 13:10, 13; 34:4; Jer. 30:4–7; Ezek. 14:21; 32:7–8; Dan. 9:26–27; Amos 8:9; Hag. 2:6).

The characteristics Jesus stated can be seen in every age of the church... for from the beginning there have been counterfeit messiahs... national and

international upheavals... and religious persecution. ... But these things will *increase and intensify* as the time of Jesus' coming draws near.

So the question is... do we see these things increasing and intensifying. ... You have probably looked at the reports (as I have) that point to an unqualified "yes." The U.S. Geological Survey reports such an increase of earthquakes in recent years. I tried this week to get my hands on the most current information about the number of global conflicts in the world today. That was somewhat tricky but according to the Global Conflict Tracker by the Council on Foreign Relations – they identified 27 significant conflicts so far in 2024 (the majority being civil wars... territorial disputes... and then nations against another nation.) And then I read this by another author: "Given that these conflicts affect regions with dense populations... a considerable portion of the global population lives in areas impacted by war..."

One article that I read attempted to play down the reports of such increasing and intensifying signs by pointing out that the reports may not show an actual increase of these issues – but only that we have better technology today to record and report these events – which may have been just as frequent before we were able to sense and collect the data.

To me... this does not diminish them as a sign. They are being reported much more frequently and having greater intensity. ... And the prophecy concerning nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom – nothing has ever come close to fulfilling it – as did the two world wars of recent years. They were kingdom against kingdom – the likes of which had never been seen before. Today we see Arab nations in alliance against Western nations. Communist conglomerates against Free Market nations.

Natural disasters and social upheavals (whether only now known to us... and formerly unknown) today they are causing greater global chaos – and THAT seems to be the point Jesus and the other prophecies made. There will be greater chaos caused by them.

What about false messiahs? Have there been many rise up lately? Yes. Charles Manson... Jim Jones... Rev. Sun Myung Moon... Maharishi Mehesh Yogi... The Bagwan who took over the nearby city of Antelope here in Central Oregon... Deprak Chopra.

On June 25, 1982, this full-page ad proclaiming the Christ was now here appeared in *the Los Angeles Times*. This same ad ran in 16 other major newspapers in selected areas throughout the world on the same day. The messages in the ads were all the same. According to the ad, the Christ goes by the name of Lord Maitreya. According to the information in the ad, Lord Maitreya is the person “known to the Christians as the Christ. And as Christians await the Second Coming, so the Jews await the Messiah, the Buddhists the fifth Buddha, the Moslems the Imam Mahdi, and the Hindus await Krishna.”

CBS News, Channel 4 out of Miami, Florida posted an article on September 12, 2006, entitled, *The Man Who Claims to be Jesus*. Puerto Rican-born Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda presides over a worldwide movement that believes he is Jesus Christ who has returned again to the earth. The church is called *Growing in Grace Ministry*. He refers to his ministry as God’s government on earth. He has a following which some say is over a million people from 30 countries.

Jesus has already noted that the mere existence of false messiahs... social upheaval... wars... and cosmic signs is not the signal of the coming of the end (here in verses 7–11). But their increase will be. In other words... Jesus separates for His disciples the destruction of the Temple from the end of the world – which will be later.

I am going to have to (abruptly) break it off... leave it right here... and “go at it again” next week. I’m not sure how far we will get... but starting with verse 12 Jesus will now describe something that precedes these “non-end” events – and that is persecution! ... He will warn His 12 disciples to expect persecution in their near future. Even before the Temple’s destruction (and close to the time of it.) He tells them that they will be persecuted. Personal chaos is coming to YOU. ... AND IT DID!

We are going to pick up with that next week. We are also going to see MUCH greater evidence for believing that Christ’s return is VERY-VERY close. ... You will see why I say that... so don’t miss it. ... In fact it is so eminent – it could even happen before we make it to next Sunday. So let me ask you... are you ready...? Do you know that Jesus is coming for you...?

You need to believe that what He said is true and make Him the Master of your life.