

FORERUNNER SCHOOL OF MINISTRY – DAVID SLIKER

KNOWING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES (MT. 24:33)

Three Timing Indicators of the Return of Christ, Part 1 – Israel (Matt. 23:37-39)

I. REVIEW: UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

³² ***Learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! 34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words (prophecies) will by no means pass away. (Matthew 24:32–35)***

- A. There are many prophesied signs in Scripture that mark the final generation as unique. These signs give us the understanding that we are in a unique season in redemptive history. Yet many make wrong assumptions regarding Matthew 24:36 and 44:
1. ***Wrong assumption #1: “No one can know the day or the hour”, which would falsely imply a sudden, unexpected departure.*** No one can know the day or the hour, but Jesus Himself made clear that we could (and should) know the season, or the *generation*, of His return.
 2. ***Wrong assumption #2: “No one will ever know the day or the hour.”*** It is true that “of that day” no one knows, only the Father Himself. That does not mean, however, that we will never know the time of His coming.
 3. The Bible gives precise information to believers (number of days, months, and years pertaining to certain events in the last days) that will give us great hope in the midst of great trial. We may still not know the exact day or hour, but we will have great hope alive within us that there is a predetermined end to the trial that will soon come.
- B. The subject of the signs of the times is greatly neglected by many within the Body of Christ. Yet many Scriptures emphasize how important prophetic signs are at the end of the age. Scripture shows that Jesus, more than any of the apostles, instructed on our need to discern the times. Jesus gave severe rebukes to those who did not pay attention to the prophetic signs that pointed to His first coming. The following verses are examples of the mandate to Jesus to pay attention to signs of His return: Matthew 16:1-4 and 24:32-44, Luke 19:41-44, and Luke 21:34-36.
- C. There are three types of biblical “indicators” that indicate to the generation in which the Lord returns that His coming is near:
- 1). ***Sign events:*** these are predicted in Scripture and alert us to the timing of Jesus’ return.
 - 2). ***Sign trends:*** both positive and negative sign trends will signal His coming
 - 3). ***Prophetic experiences:*** subjective personal experiences alert us to the end times.

II. JESUS CONNECTED THREE EVENTS TO HIS RETURN

- A. There are **three key sign trends** that strongly indicate that we are in the generation of the Lord's return. Jesus personally connected the timing of His return to the earth to three events that are all emerging simultaneously in this hour of history:
1. Jesus connected the timing of His return to the **repentance and revival of Jewish political and spiritual leaders in Jerusalem** in Matthew 23:37-39.
 2. Jesus connected the timing of His return to **the preaching of the gospel throughout the whole earth** in Matthew 24:14.
 3. Jesus connected the timing of His return to **night and day prayer** happening on the earth in Luke 18:7-8.
- B. All three trends are, in a clear, measurable way, happening in this generation in a manner that is unique to any other time in redemptive history. Messianic (Jewish) congregations of believers in Israel and Jerusalem are experiencing more growth through conversions than any time in church history since the 1st century. There has been a notable statistical increase in particular over the past ten years. This trend is one that has also been reflected in the modern missions world: a notable spike in the increase of church planting and world evangelism over the past decade alone.
- C. Evangelical missions organizations are now conservatively projecting that the gospel will have been heard by every people group and language on the earth for the first time in church history in the time frame of 2025 to 2032.
- D. The recent increase of night and day prayer across the earth is unique in any generation throughout church history – this is a historic hour for prayer initiatives (24/7 and otherwise), prayer gatherings, stadium gatherings, and the planting of houses of prayer worldwide.

III. JESUS' PROPHECY TO JERUSALEM'S LEADERSHIP (MATT. 23:39)

³⁷ ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 See! Your house is left to you desolate; 39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ ” (Matt. 23:37-39)***

- A. In this passage, Jesus has just initiated the most intense confrontation yet with the obstinate leadership of the scribes and the Pharisees of Jerusalem. Some of the leaders that Jesus rebuked directly in Matthew 23:1-36 were part of the overall spiritual leadership of the nation of Israel known as the *Sanhedrin*.

- B. The Sanhedrin functioned as a type of ancient “Knesset” (the current legislative branch of Israeli government) or governmental assembly of Jewish leadership. The scribes and the Pharisees that Jesus chastised sat on a 71-member council of leaders that governed the affairs of the nation (under the authority of Rome and Pilate, its representative) that would, a few days later, gather to put Him to death (Matt. 24:59).
- C. Jesus, in Matt. 23:29-36, moves beyond rebuking the leadership of Jerusalem for their hypocrisy to condemning them for their murderous rejection of the prophets – the “woes” that He has been proclaiming over them because of their behavior have culminated in the recognition of what they are about to do: what their fathers have always done.
1. They had imagined that, if they had lived in the times of Isaiah and Jeremiah, they would have acted differently than their fathers – yet they were on the precipice of a murder far more heinous and wicked. They are truly the sons of those who murdered the prophets of old, from Abel to Zechariah. Jesus proclaims to them, “Go on then, finish what you started!” (Matt. 23:32; cf. 1 Thess. 2:16) They had personally come to the full measure of the wickedness they were looking for as a sign of the coming of the Messiah!¹ (cf. Daniel 8:23)
- D. Yet, at the climax of this passage, the tone of Jesus’ proclamation dramatically shifts. He moves from rebuke and condemnation to a public lament at the fate of Jerusalem and, particularly, its leadership. He longed for things to go differently with Him – that they would not reject and murder Him as they had done so many times in their past. They did not want Him as their Messiah. They had made their choice – therefore they would be left as “desolate”, or without leadership, protection, and the presence of God. Jesus proclaims over them the prophecy of Hosea:
- ¹⁵ I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.” (Hosea 5:15)***
- E. Jesus prophecies over them, declaring that their desolation (the withdrawal of Himself) would end on the day that they proclaim, “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*”. There would be a coming day in which the *leadership* would openly proclaim Psalm 118:25-26:
- ²⁵ Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity. ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We have blessed you from the house of the LORD. (Ps. 118:25-26)***

¹ Blomberg, Craig L.; *The New American Commentary: Matthew*; Broadman Press; Nashville, TN, 1992

- F. This proclamation represents a genuine welcoming of the Messiah of Israel, or the one sent by God to save the people of Israel from oppression. The peoples of Jerusalem and Israel had proclaimed this phrase corporately just a few days earlier (Matt. 21:9); yet Jesus prophesied of a coming day in which the leadership of Israel would receive Him in the same manner, with full understanding of their offence as well as full recognition of Jesus of Nazareth as the Holy One of Israel. They said it, Jesus indicated, but “**you**” will say it, He prophesied.

IV. THE RETURN OF ISRAEL TO THE WORLD SCENE

- A. One of the most significant prophetic signs for the Church is the re-emergence of Israel as a political state. The return of Israel as a nation in 1948 after her total destruction at the hands of Rome in 135 AD is unprecedented in history. It is one of the most significant and important events in our generation. This shocking event on May 15th, 1948, was followed by the Six-Day War and the recapturing of Jerusalem in June of 1967. This marked the beginning of a chain of events that set the stage for the fulfillment of hundreds of prophetic scriptures for the first time in 1,800 years. These scriptures spoke of the current political, religious, and social context of Israel:
- B. Prophetic scriptures spoke of a future time of worldwide hostility towards Israel and Jerusalem, specifically: a coming day in which the nations would gather to again attempt to fully destroy that city (cf. Zech. 12:2-3). Therefore, it is important to watch the trend of anti-Semitism that is sweeping the globe and increasing in intensity and frequency – particularly in Europe.²
- C. Anti-Semitism increase significantly in the days to come. Revelation shows Satan attempting to exterminate the Jewish people so that a believing remnant cannot invite Jesus to rule Israel as her Messiah. (Rev. 12:13-17). An angel revealed Israel’s great trouble in the End-Times to Daniel (Dan. 12:1-10). Israel’s condition just before Jesus’ Coming includes being in prison camps and assaulted by foreign armies (Isa. 11:11-16; 27:12-13; 42:6-24; 49:5-25; 61:1-2; Jer. 30:3-24; 31:1-23; Ezek. 20:33–44; 39:25-29; Hos. 11:10-11; Amos 9:8-15; Joel 3:1-2; Zeph. 3:19-20; Zech 9:10-14).
- D. Islamic terrorism was prophesied by Jesus. The initial fulfillment of this prophecy occurred in the first century at the hands of fellow Jews like Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9), then again by the crusaders through the Middle Ages. The most dramatic fulfillment of this prophecy will be in the End-Times by Islamic terrorists which will greatly increase (Ezek. 35:1-36:7).

² ***The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. (Jn. 16:2)***

- E. For Israel to speak the Hebrew language after being out of their homeland for 2,000 years is an unprecedented occurrence in history. Yet, today in Israel the Hebrew language is being spoken again as the official language.³ Some interpret Zephaniah 3 as speaking of this:

² “Report: Anti-Semitism on the Rise Globally”, CNN News Website, March 14th, 2008.

³ “The World Factbook”, Central Intelligence Agency Website.

⁹ For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord. (Zeph. 3:9)

- F. Jesus warned of difficult times for Jerusalem in the future regarding an unprecedented time of trouble and hardship for the people there that would take place so swiftly, residents would barely have time to escape (Matt. 24:15-20). He specifically commanded that believers, when the trouble unfolds, would pray that this terrible event would not happen during the winter or on the Sabbath:

²⁰ And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. (Matt. 24:20)

1. In our time, for the first time in thousands of years, Israel has established the Saturday Sabbath as an official day of rest.⁴ Today, in Israel, the day is so strictly observed by Orthodox Jews that *all* activity shuts down there (including the use of certain elevators!). As observed by one visitor recently:
2. *“Keeping the Israeli Sabbath is hard work, even if you aren't a tourist, particularly if you're unmoved by its pleasures. Hence the dislike of many secular Israelis for Saturday—the streets cleared of buses, the shuttered grocery stores, the understaffed hospitals—as well as for the black-hatted men in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods who stone Sabbath-breakers and who have in Israel's half-century of existence twice brought down governments for violating Sabbath laws.”⁵*

V. THE COMING REVIVAL AMONGST JEWISH LEADERSHIP

- A. More noteworthy than the re-emergence, politically, of Israel and Jerusalem on the world scene is the presence of a remnant of Jewish believers in that nation, as Paul noted in the book of Romans (Romans 9:27, 11:5). It is noteworthy that Messianic (Jewish) congregations of believers in Israel are experiencing more growth through conversions than any time in church history since the 1st century:

1. In a survey of Messianic Believers in Israel conducted in 1999, the number of congregations had increased from 2 (in 1970) to 81; the number of Jewish believers had, from 1970-1999, increased from under 200 believers to 2200 believers.⁶

⁴ "[Jewish Festivals and Days of Remembrance in Israel](#)". Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website.

⁵ Judith Shulevitz, Slate Magazine, “The View From Saturday: Secular Israelis Try to Rescue the Sabbath”. July 29th, 2005.

⁶ Survey conducted by Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil F. Skjøtt. Jerusalem: United Christian Council in Israel in cooperation with the Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies, 1999.

2. It is *currently* estimated by some (including the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel) that there are presently up to 120 Messianic congregations in the land of Israel comprising between 10-15,000 individuals. In other words, the number of congregations has increased by 50%. The number of believers in Israel has increased by nearly 700% *in ten years*.
- B. We live in a time of unprecedented salvation regarding the Jewish remnant of believers – which Paul attributed to the proof that God was not finished with them as a people (Rom. 11:5). The move of the Holy Spirit in our generation to lead many within Israel to faith in Jesus Christ is something that the earth has not seen since the first century! Equally as amazing is the prophetic promise of the Lord to establish night and day prayer in Jerusalem until it experiences *full revival* and transformation, as proclaimed by Isaiah:
- 6 I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, 7 And give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. (Isa. 62:6-7)***
- C. What is stunning is that Jesus prophesied specifically about the Jewish political and spiritual leadership openly celebrating Him as the Messiah! The prophet Zechariah spoke of this as well, related to all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem:
- 10 “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zech. 12:10)***
- D. Yet, a few verses earlier, Zechariah spoke of the political leaders of Judah being used mightily by God during that same time frame:
- 5 And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, “The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in the LORD of hosts, their God.’ 6 In that day I will make the governors of Judah like a firepan in the woodpile, and like a fiery torch in the sheaves; they shall devour all the surrounding peoples on the right hand and on the left, but Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place—Jerusalem. (Zech. 12:5-6)***
1. In this passage, the political leadership of Jerusalem moves in unusual anointing from the Holy Spirit to resist the hopeless siege of Jerusalem taking place at that time. Just before the national revival of Zech. 12:10, the leadership of Israel turn to their God just before receiving Jesus at His coming (Matt. 23:39).

- E. The current move of the Spirit in Israel is the beginning of the beginning of the last phases of God’s plan to fully save and deliver Israel from great trouble in the days to come. The first phase of the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 23 came to pass in the generation of His first coming: **desolation**. The word that Jesus used in that passage for desolation is an adjective derived from the word meaning “wilderness”. Israel lost everything after the first coming of Jesus and was scattered by Rome to the “wilderness” of the nations for 1800 years.
- F. Yet we live in the days of the second phase of the prophecy: **restoration**. On the day that the Jewish leadership welcomes their Messiah with great joy, the “times of the restoration of all things” will be at hand (Acts 3:21). There has never been a time in history where we have been closer to this moment than today, as Israel has returned, Jerusalem is under Jewish political and spiritual leadership, Jews are turning to Christ in historic numbers in the land, and groups of these believers are gathering to pray night and day for the revival of Jerusalem for the first time in 1800 years.
- G. Jesus, in Matthew 23:39, knit the culmination of these events to His return to the planet. While we do not know the exact time frame in which the peoples and the leaders will cry out for their Messiah, there has never been a more significant and exciting time in history for the fulfillment of prophecy and the culmination of our “blessed hope”, the glorious appearing of our great God and savior Jesus Christ.