

Are We in the End Times? Look for These Biblical Signs

In Matthew 24, Jesus was with his closest disciples on the Mount of Olives, across the small Kidron Valley, to the east of the temple and the old city of Jerusalem. The disciples took advantage of this private “face time” with their Teacher to ask some important questions about prophetic signs of the times, His messianic rule and the end of this age (v. 3).

The prophets had written about these future seasons and events, but the topics were often interwoven and the timing of the events was not easily discerned. This was compounded by the fact that most predictive prophecy can have a near picture as well as a future fulfillment potential.

Jesus warned them that, in the last days, deception will run rampant, and imposters will claim to be the Messiah. In addition to this religious deception, social and political upheaval, natural calamities, disloyalty, and religious and ethnic persecution will rise and fall as precursors of the actual end times.

Jesus described these recurring seasons of adversity as “the beginning of sorrows.” The term relates to the birth pains of a mother’s delivery. But these things were merely indicators of the predicted end of the age.

He went on to warn that true disciples, in those days, will face intense persecution “for My name’s sake.” Hatred and betrayal will be common, as lawlessness abounds and “the love of many will grow cold.” But the Lord promised that those who persevere under the pressures of these adversities and stresses “shall be saved.”

Finally, Jesus predicted to them the destruction of their beloved temple and tied that future reality to the fulfillment

of the prophet Daniel's teaching (9:27) about the "abomination of desolation." This is when a "prince who is to come" will confirm a covenant "with many" for seven years and then break that agreement after three and one-half years. He will demand that the Jews stop the daily sacrifices in the (rebuilt) temple. Instead, he will set up his own image in the temple and require the Jews to worship it (him).

That event will commence a "great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21). In fact, He told them "unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved" (Matt. 24:22a).

In Luke's account of this dialog with the disciples (21:25-28) Jesus taught there will be amazing signs happening with the sun, the moon and the stars. And on earth, major earthquakes and roaring oceans will bring panic and great natural disasters. "Then," He told them, men "will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27).

Jesus Promised to Return

Christ's future coming was not only a prophetic event to be anticipated but a promise from our Lord's own lips to be believed. In the process of teaching His disciples about His imminent death, Jesus explained that He would leave to "prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

The Angels Affirmed It

It was this promise that the angels reiterated and affirmed after the disciples witnessed Him ascending to heaven in a cloud. "Suddenly, two men stood by them in white garments. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why stand looking toward heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you to heaven, will come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven' (Acts 1:10-11). Jesus will literally return to the Mount of Olives,

from which He ascended, when He returns to fight against the rebellious nations at the “day of the Lord” (Zech. 14:1-4).

Paul Confirmed It

Last, in sequence, the apostle Paul confidently confirmed Christ’s second coming in personal and written instruction to the churches he founded. He taught the Thessalonians that he revealed this “mystery” or previously unknown truth about the Lord’s return on the authority of “the word of the Lord” Himself. Then he shared a threefold announcement, followed by a threefold promise. Can you catch them in this great passage?

“The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we shall be forever with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Notice that the context of the Lord’s coming from heaven for his saints is not a secret, silent coming! It features 1) a powerful shout, 2) the voice of an archangel and 3) the sounding of the trumpet of God. If we were to use our “sanctified speculation,” we might add our own interpretation to these announcements.

Could it be that Christ is shouting creatively to create our new glorified bodies? The saints who have “fallen asleep in Christ” will come back to life and join with the living saints to be transformed from natural physical bodies to spiritual bodies, enhanced to exist in the celestial heavens.

The Modern English Version calls them “celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies.” Then it says those resurrected from the dead “are sown a natural body” and supernaturally “raised a spiritual body” and are the first to rise and meet our Lord in the air!

In fact, you can read all about this resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:35-56. Paul summarizes this “mystery” in verses 51 and 52: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Could it be that the archangel is Gabriel (the heavenly messenger who “stands in the presence of God” Luke 1:19, 26) announcing the second coming of the King, as he did to Mary at our Lord Jesus’ first coming (Luke 1:26-38)?

And, could the trumpet be “the last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52, which calls for the rapture of the saints and the resurrection of the righteous dead in Christ in 1 Thessalonians 4:16? And does this triumphal event of the ages coincide with Mathew 24:29-31 and the “gathering together of His elect”? And, likewise for Isaiah 27:12-13 and Revelation 8:1-2, 11:14-19, 15:1 – 16:21?

Finally, following the threefold announcements accompanying our Lord’s return for his people (as read in 1 Thess. 4:13-18) are the threefold promises: 1) the dead in Christ will rise first, 2) we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and 3) so we shall be forever with the Lord. These are precious promises for believers, both those “asleep in Christ” and those still “walking with the King.”

The timing of the rapture of the living saints and the resurrection of the dead in Christ is not as important as whether we are watching and waiting for His return. Paul says, “You are all the sons of light and the sons of the day. We are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as others do. But let us be alert and sober” (1 Thess. 5:5-6).

The Comfort of Christ’s Coming

Jesus is coming to earth again! He personally promised it. The

angels affirmed it and the apostle Paul confirmed it “by the word of the Lord” Himself.

Paul ends this revelatory “mystery” by urging us in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 to find great hope and precious comfort in knowing these great truths and then living by them in such a way that we can “hasten” the coming day of God (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

Jesus is coming again. “He will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to save those who eagerly wait for Him” (Heb. 9:28).

Let us persevere in spreading this Good News through bold faith and humble actions, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in these last days. {eoa}

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