

What will be the Sign?

Matthew 24

It had been a long day, Jesus returned to the city by way of the barren fig tree to teach His disciples the power of faith. He enters the temple, where the chief priest and elders of the people question His authority. Jesus responds to their question with a question, "I will ask you one thing, which if you tell me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" They avoid the question and Jesus does not answer theirs. Jesus then goes on to teach the parable of the landowner and the marriage feast. He answers the Pharisees' question about the "poll tax", the Sadducee's question about marriage in heaven (even though they did not believe in the resurrection) and the lawyer's question about which is the great commandment of the law. As the Pharisees were all gathered together, Jesus asks, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They answered, "The son of David. Jesus follow up question left them speechless, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET" '?" "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" From that point on, no one dared to ask Him another question. Jesus then speaks to the multitude and his disciples and tells them, "therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do them." He proceeds to expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, condemn their actions, and says, "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate." Jesus leaves the temple never to return.

Jesus and His disciples were walking away from the temple, through the Kidron valley toward the Mount of Olives, possibly headed for Bethany, when the disciples look back in awe. They see the top of the beautiful temple Herod the Great had refurbished along with all the other structures on the temple mount glowing with the lights from hundreds of torches. Jesus response must have shocked them all, "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." Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem when the disciples ask, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming?"

The private conversation between Jesus has with His disciples follows, it is known as "The Olivet Discourse". It is Jesus Christ teaching on what is to come starting in Matthew 24:3 and runs through Matthew 25:46. Jesus provides them with historical events, that will happen. He warns them of false teachers that will mislead many. He tells them there will be wars and rumors of war but do not be afraid, that's not the end. Nations will rise against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms, there will be famines and earthquakes but that is not the end but merely the beginning of birth pangs. He tells them they will be delivered up to be killed, that they will be hated, and again Jesus warns them of false teachers. Lawlessness will increase and the people will grow cold. It will be a time where people will unashamedly flaunt their sins and draw others along with them. Then, "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". During the end times, the Anti-christ will lead a coalition of nations that will be similar to the ancient Roman Empire. He will be an impressive leader, able to do miraculous things, he will even promise to protect Israel from her enemies. He will deliver on that promise and win the battle with the countries or nations who attack Israel from the south, north and east. Then, while in Israel, as her protector, he will reveal the true nature of his actions and plan. The Anti-christ, the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, will take his seat in the Temple of God and claim to be God. That which Daniel spoke will be seen, standing in the holy place, the abomination of desolation. It will be a time of great tribulation that will exceed anything this world and mankind has ever seen. The world as we know it will cease to exist. The consistency of all that we see will shift, the sun will darken, the moon will not give off her light, the stars will fall from the sky and the powers of heaven will be shaken all in preparation for the appearance of the Son of Man.

As we continue through the Olivet Discourse, we need to remember it was spoken to the disciples but meant for those who will experience all the events of the end of the age and the coming of Jesus Christ. The detail and specificity contained in Jesus words have been given to us so we can be alert, protected from being led astray and strengthened. We do not know when He will return but we need to pay attention, discerning and unsurprised. May those who will see God's perfect plan unfold before our very eyes understand what they are seeing and be strengthened so they can be among those who "endure to the end" and are saved.

1. Read verses 1-3. Where are Jesus and his disciples? What question did the disciples ask and why did they ask it? List what Jesus tells them in verses 4-14. What did you learn from your lists?

2. What is the “Abomination of Desolation” and why is it important? (24:15) (See Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; 21:11; 21:20; 7:24; 2:40-43; 9:27:10:40-45; Revelation 17:4-5; 13:1; 21:27;)

3. Make a list of what happens after the tribulation. What warnings are contained in verses 15-28 and what particular event caught your attention?

4. List the events that will happen immediately after the tribulation of those days? What should we expect? (29-31) What do we learn from the parable of the fig tree? What were the days of Noah like and what should we expect? What do verses 30-41?

5. Read verses 42-51 and list the things you learn from these verses. What do we need to be on the alert for? What do you think would happen if we knew when Jesus was going to return?