

Questions about Signs and the End Times

Sermon by Andy Sochor

Text: Matthew 24:1-3

After Islamist militants attacked Israeli civilians on October 7, Israel went to war with Hamas. When this conflict escalated, many wondered how this fit with Bible prophecy. Was it possibly a sign of the end times? This is nothing new. Any significant military conflict involving Israel seems to bring about these questions. It is helpful to know what (if anything) the Bible says about this. Matthew 24 is key in this. Many misinterpret this chapter, but understanding what Jesus taught will help us with these questions.

The Disciples' Questions

- Jesus told His disciples the temple would be destroyed (Matthew 24:1-2), so they asked three questions (Matthew 24:3) – (1) When will these things happen? (2) What will be the sign of Your coming? (3) What will be the sign at the end of the age?
- Jesus answered these questions in this chapter

Two Mistakes in Interpretation

- The Premillennialist – believes Jesus is returning to establish His kingdom and reign for 1,000 years; his mistake is in reading Matthew 24 as if it is all about the end, and possibly unfolding now (or soon); this interpretation has a problem with timing (Matthew 24:34)
- The Preterist – believes the second coming, judgment, end of the world, and resurrection occurred in A.D. 70; his mistake is in reading Matthew 24 as if it is all about the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; this interpretation has a problem with Jesus' statement about not knowing when the day would occur (Matthew 24:36-37)

What Jesus Teaches

- First, Jesus spoke of things that would take place before “the end” (Matthew 24:4-14) – He was talking about “the end” which would occur during “this [the current] generation” (Matthew 24:34); it would occur after the gospel would be “preached in the whole world” (Matthew 24:14; Colossians 1:23)
- Second, Jesus spoke of events that would take place immediately before “the end” (Matthew 24:15-31) – He referred to the “abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15); this would “do away with the regular sacrifice” (Daniel 11:31; 12:11), indicating that it was a judgment against Jerusalem
- Third, Jesus told the parable of the fig tree (Matthew 24:32-35) – His point was that there would be observable signs to indicate that “the end” was near; this would occur during “this generation” (Matthew 24:34)

- Fourth, Jesus spoke of a different “coming” of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:36-51) – unlike what He discussed in the first half of the chapter, this would not be preceded by observable signs; it would occur at an unknown and unknowable date; like the flood (Matthew 24:37), the only “sign” was preaching that warned of judgment (2 Peter 2:5; Acts 17:30-31); would result in a separation (Matthew 24:40-41), not “rapture” but judgment (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29); would bring blessings for the faithful and punishment for the unfaithful (Matthew 25:46); would result in eternal suffering after judgment (Matthew 25:46), unlike the suffering during the destruction of Jerusalem that was “cut short” (Matthew 24:22)
- Jesus was not referring to just ONE event in Matthew 24 – He warned of hardships coming when Jerusalem would be destroyed so His disciples would be prepared; He also spoke of a final day of judgment that would affect the whole world (cf. Matthew 25:31-32)

What This Means for Us Today

- We need to be careful about connecting current events to Bible prophecies – false prophets will try to mislead God’s people (Matthew 24:23-25); do not listen to them (Deuteronomy 18:22)
- We need to prepare for a final judgment when the Lord returns (2 Corinthians 5:10) – we will be judged according to His word (John 12:48)
- We need to be ready for this at all times (Matthew 24:42-44) – rather than looking for signs to prepare, we need to look to God’s word to prepare (2 Peter 3:9-14)

Conclusion

- The city of Jerusalem was destroyed because the Jewish nation (as a whole) rejected Christ
- Jesus warned His disciples about it so they could escape before the Roman army came in
- He also said there is a final judgment – no signs to indicate it is coming; we must be ready at all times