

I. JESUS TEACHING ON THE SIGNS OF HIS RETURN - MATTHEW 24, MARK 13 & LUKE 21

- A. *The goal of this teaching* is 1) to understand the significance of the times in which we are living and 2) to connect certain historical, social, technological, religious and moral trends and situations with the Bible.
- B. The disciples asked Jesus what the “signs” would be of His coming and the establishing of His Kingdom (Mat. 24:3; Mk. 13:3–4; Lk. 21:7). He taught that in the timeframe leading up to His return—the final generation of natural human history, these signs would occur. Today, signs are more discernible, universal and simultaneous unlike any other time in human history. We are living in the generation of which Jesus was speaking. A biblical generation is 40–100 years (Gen 15:13-16; Num. 32:13; Ps. 90:10; Mt. 1:17; Acts 7:6)
- C. *The Bible endorses this topic*: The Bible itself mentions “the Signs of the Times”, but most Bible teachers neglect this message. Jesus strongly rebuked the religious leaders of His day because they did not pay attention to the prophetic signs of His first coming (Mt. 16:1–3; Lk. 12:54–56; cf. Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:18–20). The Bible contains 150 chapters related to what Jesus will do at and only 89 related to what He did at His first coming. Should we not know the signs for His second coming?
- D. *Many Biblical books, one story-line*: The entire Scripture tells one storyline of human salvation and God coming to dwell with man forever on earth. When studying the Lord’s return as we combine the insights of each Biblical author, we are able to determine with clarity the season in which the Lord returns.
- E. *Past mistakes and advances in the Church regarding discerning the Signs of the Times*. We should acknowledge when teaching this subject, some have made errors in their teaching. However, they did bring this topic to the forefront of the conversation, but some made poor applications when doing so. OUR GOAL is to be precise and responsible, while we engage our generation in conversation regarding this topic, spurring the Church to watch and pray, and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, prepare their communities and live with urgency before the Lord.

II. THREE CATEGORIES OF END TIME SIGNS

There are three main categories of end time signs: trends, events and cosmic signs

- A. **Trends**: Scripture reveals both positive and negative trends that will signal the return of Jesus. These progressive and discernible patterns are emerging in social, economic, political, religious, moral, technological and military areas. Example of positive trends are the completion of the Great Commission (Mat. 24:14), the escalation of the prayer movement (Luke 18:7–8; Mal. 1:11), the Church walking in Bridal identity (Rev. 22:17) and standing with God’s purposes for Israel amidst persecution (Isa. 62:6–7; Rev. 12:6, 13–17). Negative trends include increase of wars and ethnic conflict (Mat. 24:7), famine (Mat. 24:8), persecution of the saints (Mat. 24:9) and the falling away from the faith (Mat. 24:12; 1 Tim. 4:1). Trends are not as recognizable as events so they are not as faith-building, but over decades and centuries can be clearly seen.
- B. **Events**: Scripture predicts actual events that will occur signaling the nearness of the Lord’s return. These signs are time indicators, non-negotiable in their occurrence before the coming of the Day of the Lord as described in Scripture. One of the main events that have already happened is the reestablishing of the nation of Israel (Isa. 66:8; Ezek. 38:8; Amos 9:14–15). Others that will occur are the rebuilding of a third temple in Jerusalem (2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 11:1-2), the covenant confirmed with the Antichrist (Dan. 9:27; Isa. 28:15, 18–19) and the “abomination of desolation” (Mat. 24:15; Dan. 12:11). Sign events to build faith and alert the Church to a new time period the earth has entered.

C. **Cosmic signs:** There will be dramatic signs in the heavens that will cause many to fear (Joel 2:28–31).

¹¹“**There will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.**” (Lk. 21:11)

III. JESUS IDENTIFIED 21 GLOBAL TRENDS BEFORE HIS RETURN

These trends would occur in all three major end time timeframes of natural human history.

A. Jesus gave **21 global trends** that combined with prophetic people and sign events, signal the generation in which He will return (Mt. 24:3–28; Mk. 13:3–23, Lk. 21:7–26).

B. *These trends* are deception by false christs and prophets (Mat 24:5, 11, 24), national/international warfare (24:6), rumors of war (24:6), ethnic conflict, (24:7), economic warfare (24:7), famines, pestilences, great earthquakes, (24:8), Christian persecution (Mat. 24:9; Mk. 13:13) and martyrdom (Mat. 24:9), falling away from faith from being offended (Mat. 24:10, 12), relational betrayal (Mat. 24:10), lawlessness as seen increase in sin and rebellion (Mat. 24:12), maturity in the Church as seen through endurance (Mat. 24:13), anointed, world-wide proclamation (Mat. 24:14; Mk. 13:9–11), troubles (Mk. 13:8), commotions or “instabilities” (Lk. 24:9), signs in the sky, distress in the nations, and disturbances in the sea (Luke 21:9, 25) and anti-semitism culminating in the siege against Jerusalem, mass deportation and extermination of Jews (Lk. 21:20, 24). Matthew gives fifteen major trends, Mark adds “troubles” and Luke adds five more.

⁵“Many will come...saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many...⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars...⁷For nation will rise against nation [Gk. *ethnos*, or ethnic conflict], and kingdom against kingdom [economic warfare]. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places...⁹ “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation [Christian persecution]and kill you [martyrdom], and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. ¹⁰ And then many will be offended [falling away], will betray one another, and will hate one another...¹²And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³But he who endures [Christian maturity] to the end shall be saved. **14** And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Mt. 24:4-12)

⁸ And there will be ... troubles... (Mark 13:8)

⁹ But when you hear of wars and commotions [Literally, “instabilities”]... ¹¹“There will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven... ²⁵in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring...” (Luke 21:9, 25)

²⁰ “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies [anti-zionism], then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those [Jewish people] who are in Judea [the State of Israel] flee...²⁴ And they [Jewish people] will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations [anti-semitism]...(Luke 21:9, 20-24)

C. These have all occurred throughout human history but what makes this time period unique is these trends will all escalate the generation of Jesus’ return. Today, these trends for the most part have become more discernible (everyone will notice), universal (across the entire earth, not just in select locations) and simultaneous (all occurring at the same time) as they escalate until the end of the Great Tribulation.

IV. SIGNS RELATED TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL

- A. The most striking events in biblical prophecy was the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland, the ***reestablishment of the state of Israel*** (Isa. 66:8; Ezek. 38:8; Amos 9:14–15) and ***Jewish rule of Jerusalem*** (Joel 3:2, 12; Zech. 12:3, 6; 14:2; Lk. 21:24). Israel became a nation on May 14, 1948, and then gained control of Jerusalem in the Six-Day War (June 1967). No prophetic sign is more dramatic or convincing. The Jews were scattered to the nations in AD 70., but 2,000 years later they returned home in the largest exodus of their history just as prophesied (Amos 9:14; Jer. 16:14–15), furthermore, having retained their ***national identity, language and culture*** (Zeph. 3:9). In 1948 the Jewish population of Israel was about 75,000 but now there are around six million in the land. The rebirth of the state of Israel is a sign and wonder.
- B. ***The rebuilding of a temple*** in Jerusalem and ***reinstitution of the OT sacrificial system*** as prescribed in the Law (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14; 2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 11:1–2; 13:12–18; Dan. 9:26–27; 11:31; 12:1; Isa. 66:1).
1. What makes this future event humanly impossible is this temple would need to stand on the Temple Mount where presently the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the third Holiest site of Islam now sits, the Dome of the Rock. This location is holy for the Jews and the same location where Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moria.
 2. Today about 20% of the Jewish people in Israel are ultra orthodox to orthodox in the practice of Judaism and pressure the government of Israel for a rebuilt temple. All the necessary equipment and furnishings for this temple are already crafted according to design and prepared for use.
- C. ***The Salvation of Israel*** - One day all Israel will repent and be saved after the Lord delivers them from the Antichrist and his armies (Isa. 59:20; Rom. 11:25–26; Acts 3:19–21; Ps. 24:6–7). Jesus said He would not take the Kingship until the Jewish leaders gladly received Him (Mat. 23:37–39). Many times what God will do in the Millennial reign He will do in part before He returns, and even more when we partner with Him. Today there are 120+ Messianic congregations in Israel, totaling more than 12,000 believers. In 1970 there were only two Messianic congregations. Many would call this a revival. This revival is a sign of the mass and complete salvation of the nation of Israel in the near future when the Lord returns.
- D. ***International attention and controversy regarding Jerusalem***. Besides the Crusades—which only impacted Europe and the Muslim world, the State of Israel has never been the seat of worldwide controversy, but recently in the international community it has. In Dec. 21, 2016 when the UN General Assembly wrapped up its annual legislative session, it had adopted ***20 resolutions against Israel***—and ***only 6 resolutions on the rest of the world combined***, with ***three on Syria***, and ***one each on Iran, North Korea and Crimea***. It had no condemnation of Palestinian abuses and also did not address nations like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Venezuela, China, or Cuba and the human right concerns they each possess.
- ² ***I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken...Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant...shall not be cut off from the city. (Zech. 14:2)***
- ³ ***...Jerusalem...though all nations of the earth are gathered against it [Jerusalem]. (Zech. 12:3)***

E. Two Opposing Trends: *Anti-semitism in the Gentile world; love for Israel in the Body of Christ.*

1. Today, Anti-semitism continues to grow, many times masked in Anti-zionism. For example, the UN's biased legislation against Israel, the BDS movement on college campuses¹, as well as Islamic terrorism² all undermine the existence of Jewish people in their land. HOWEVER, despite these negative trends, there are an increasing number of Gentile Christians serving and uniting with Messianic congregations than ever before. Messianic ministries are sending Jewish believers to Gentile churches around the world and received with affection. God is raising up 24/7 prayer network for Israel in houses of prayer (Isa. 62:6-7; Psalm 122:6-9). The positive trends are highly encouraging!
2. In the future, During the Great Tribulation—the final 3 1/2 years of natural human history—anti-semitism will climax as the Antichrist will seek to annihilate the Jewish people, providing incentives for those who do so (fishermen) and while striking fear into those who resist him (hunters) (Jer. 15:15-16; Rev. 12:13-14), being far more extreme and global than Adolf Hitler during WWII (Zech 13:8-9). Many Jews will held in prison or concentration camps (Ps. 102:18-22; Isa. 27:13; 42:6-7, 13, 22-23; 49:8-25; 61:1-2; Jer. 30:3-10; Ezek. 39:25-29; Amos 9:11-15; Joel 3:1-2; Mic. 4:6; Zeph. 3:19-20; Zech. 9:10-14; 13:8; 14:2; Mt. 25:43; Lk. 21:24). YET, during this time the Church will provide refuge for Jewish people in flight (Jer. 16:16; Rev. 12:6, 14), share resources with them (Rev. 12:6, 14), perform miracles of multiplying food, healing, prophesying like Israel's O.T. prophets (i.e. Elijah), possess godly character by resisting sin in a world filled with deep darkness (Isa. 61:1; Rev. 9:21), fearlessly live a transcendent lifestyle in the face of death, due to the hope of the resurrection, and engage in anointed intercession (Isa. 62:6-7; Ps. 122:6), prophetic singing and declaration (Jer. 31:7-10), celebration and comfort of the Jewish people (Isa. 40:1-2). God will raise up many people like Corrie Ten Boom and her family that stood with God's purposes for the Jewish people.

¹⁶ ***“Behold, I [the Lord] will send for many fishermen,” says the Lord, “and they shall fish them [Catch the Jewish people for reward]; and afterward I will send for many hunters [causing fear for the Jews], and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. (Jer. 16:16)***

⁷ ***Thus says the Lord: “Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘O Lord save Your people, the remnant of Israel!’... 10 Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him [direct, protect, provide] as a shepherd does his flock.’” (Jer. 31:7, 10)***

V. TRENDS RELATED TO THE GENTILE NATIONS

- A. Global government: A 10-nation superstate will emerge, incorporating Russian, European, Middle Eastern, and North and East African nations (Ezek. 38:2-6), heavenly influenced by Islam, led by the Antichrist (Dan. 2:41-42; 7:7, 20, 24; Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12-13, 16). The main challenges for countries are international challenges that will bring these nations together, some of them being the **global war on terror** and the **global**

¹ BDS stands for *Boycott, Divest and Sanction* movement that seeks to isolate and weaken Israel economically and socially.

² Islamic terrorists belief that when they kill Jews, they offer a service to their god, *Allah* (John 16:18).

financial crisis. The tension in the financial crisis is that we have global financial markets without global rule of law. The crisis will create an atmosphere in which “global governance” will be a more attractive option to bring the “peace and safety” that people desire (1 Thes. 5:3).

B. **Globalization:** Financial institutions, commerce, communication, and geopolitics are shifting from being nation based to a globally unified expression (Rev. 17–18). Presently there are 193 nations in the UN.

1. There is a call for the political identity of a new world order, with the push to minimize national boundaries and establish a one-world currency, environmental policy, military, political process, etc.
2. In 2016, the number of people with internet access in their home is 3.3 billion. Of the top 10 internet sites in the world (measured by unique monthly visitors), 8 are American-owned companies including Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Yahoo, Amazon, and Wikipedia. Yet 80% of the users responsible for this traffic come from outside the United States, showing globalization in full force.

C. **Knowledge and travel:** Daniel prophesied a great increase of knowledge (communication) and travel (transportation) as many “*run to and fro*.” It is estimated that global tourism will generate \$5 trillion annually by 2020. Currently, the total knowledge possessed by humans doubles annually.

“Seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro [unprecedented travel], and knowledge shall increase [information age].” (Dan. 12:4)

1. The doubling of knowledge. See article by David Shilling (2013).
 - a. Knowledge doubled from 100 BC to 1700 (1800 years).
 - b. It doubled from 1700-1900 (200 years).
 - c. It doubled from 1900-1950 (50 years).
 - d. It doubled from 1950-1970 (20 years).
 - e. It doubled from 1970-1980 (10 years).
 - f. It doubled from 1980-1988 (8 years).
 - g. It now doubles every 12 months.
 - h. *Soon it will double every 12 hours.*
2. Over 80% of all the scientists who have ever lived are alive today. The scientific revolution is the most obvious development in the 20th Century, including the discovery of X-rays, radioactivity, sub-atomic particles, relativity, quantum theory, even splitting atoms, and manipulating DNA.
3. Each year about one million books are printed (that’s titles, not copies), 25,000 newspapers are published (separate newspaper titles), along with 40,000 scholarly journals, etc...
4. Over 3 billion people or about 40% of the world population has an internet connection today. In 1995, it was less than 1%. The first billion was reached in 2005, the second billion in 2010, and the third billion in 2014. There are 2.5 billion searches performed on Google every month, and there are currently over 150 million websites.

D. **Internet technology** has allowed knowledge to greatly increase. The ability of the Antichrist’s government to enforce the mark of the Beast system worldwide (Rev. 13:16-18) implies the existence of modern technology, a cashless society, and a one-world economic system.

¹⁶He causes all...to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, ¹⁷and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast. (Rev. 13:16–17)

VI. POSITIVE TRENDS

A. **Gospel preached to all nations:** Jesus connected the timing of His return to the preaching of the gospel to all nations (12,000 people groups). Leading mission leaders project that the gospel will be preached to every people group by 2020. The greatest harvest of souls in history is occurring now. The Bible has been translated into 2,000+ languages (used by 98% of the world's population).

¹⁴***"This gospel...will be preached...to all the nations [ethnos] and then the end will come." (Mt. 24:14)***

B. **Bridal identity:** John connected Jesus' return to the Church understanding her bridal identity. This is occurring in a global way for the first time in history (Rev. 22:17; cf. Mt. 25:1–13).

¹⁷***The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" (Rev. 22:17)***

C. **Global prayer and worship movement:** The Spirit is raising up a prayer and worship movement (Rev. 22:17; 8:4; cf. Lk. 18:7–8; Isa. 62:6–7; 24:14–16; 25:9; 26:8–9; 27:2–5, 13; 30:18–19; 42:10–13; 51:11; 52:8; Joel 2:12–17, 32; Mic. 5:3–4; Zeph. 2:1–3; Ps. 102:17–20; 122:6; Zech. 12:10). Isaiah prophesied 24/7 prayer ministries would exist at His return (Isa. 62:6–7). Only one generation will see the fulfillment of God's promise to "set" watchmen (intercessors) in place to cry out 24/7 until Jerusalem becomes a praise in the earth as His return. In 1985 there were 25 houses of prayer in the earth going 24/7; today the conservative estimate is that there are 10,000 houses of prayer going 24/7.

⁶***I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace [be silent, NASB] day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, ⁷and give Him no rest till He...makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth [at the second coming]. (Isa. 62:6–7)***

D. **Outpouring of the Spirit:** The Lord promised to pour out His Spirit on all believers (Acts 2:17–21). The increase of the number of believers with "charismatic" theology and experience has grown from *one million* (1920) to *60 million* (1970) to over *600 million* today—this is a sign of the times.

VII. NEGATIVE TRENDS

A. **Harlot Babylon worldwide religion** (Rev. 17:2–6): The harlot Babylon religion of tolerance will be characterized by moral relativity without absolutes and religious pluralism with syncretism.

B. **Lawlessness abounds:** Sin will reach its fullest expression (Mt. 13:??; 24:12; Rev. 14:18; cf. Dan. 8:23)

1. **Violence (days of Noah):** There are 50 million abortions worldwide each year (over 100,000 per day). The abortion pill will cause this number to increase greatly. There are 35 million slaves (human trafficking), and the number is growing by 5 million per year (Rev. 18:13).

2. **Immorality (days of Lot):** Immorality will increase greatly in the end times (Rev. 9:21; 14:8; 17:1–4; 18:2–4, 9–10; 19:2). Over \$100 billion is spent each year on pornography worldwide, with nearly 5 million pornographic websites that consist of over 500 million pages. Holograms and virtual reality will enable people to experience even more sexual perversion. Paul prophesied that marriage would be forbidden, or outlawed, in some places (1 Tim. 4:3).

¹***The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits...***³***forbidding to marry.*** (1 Tim. 4:1–3)