

Discerning The Signs of The Times & Preparing For His Return

I. Discerning The Seasons

(Matthew 24:32-33 NASB) “Now learn the parable from the fig tree: as soon as its branch has become tender and sprouts its leaves, you know that summer is near; 33 so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.”

- a. After thoroughly detailing the trends and events leading to the "beginning of birth pains" (the decades preceding Christ's return) and the Great Tribulation (the final 3 ½ years of this age), Jesus underscores the purpose behind His extensive teaching. He opened with a clear warning: "See to it that no one misleads you." The parable of the fig tree highlights that Jesus expects us to recognize and understand these end-time events with the same ease we discern the changing seasons, provided we know what to look for. A passive or apathetic attitude towards the subject of the end times can make us susceptible to deception, given the abundant information in the scriptures about the trends and events related to the end of the age.

(Matthew 24:4 NASB) “...See to it that no one misleads you.”

(Matthew 16:1-3 NASB) “The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and putting Jesus to the test, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But He replied to them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ 3 And in the morning, ‘There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but are you unable to discern the signs of the times?”

(2 Thessalonians 2:3 NASB) “No one is to deceive you in any way! For it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction”

- b. Jesus calls us to exercise wisdom and discernment by recognizing the signs of the end times. His teachings in the Olivet Discourse stress the importance of being prepared and helping others to be ready for His return. Daniel prophesied about a group of end time believers who would possess understanding and provide insight to others. Likewise, Paul, during his brief time establishing the church in Thessalonica, prioritized equipping them with knowledge about the end of the age. He considered it vital for this understanding to form a foundational teaching to help them endure their current hardships.

(Daniel 11:32-33 NASB) “but the people who know their God will be strong and take action. 33 And those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many”

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 NASB) “Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, regarding the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit, or a message, or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 No one is to deceive you in any way! For it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?”

- c. Due to the wealth of information in the Scriptures regarding the signs of the times, we can clearly identify the indicators that signify "He is near, right at the door." There's no need to seek out signs of His coming that are not explicitly outlined in the Bible. While geopolitical events and natural disasters may serve as general indicators of the earth yearning for Jesus's return, scripture provides clear and specific signs to help us discern the times and seasons accurately.

(Isaiah 8:12 NASB) “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ Regarding everything that this people call a conspiracy, and you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it.”

II. The Generation Will Not Pass Away Until All These Things Take Place

(Matthew 24:34-35 NASB) ***“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”***

- a. When Jesus refers to "*this generation*," He is not addressing a specific demographic of people born and living at the same time (like Gen X, Gen Z, Millennials, etc...). Rather, He is alluding to a transhistorical spiritual generation that began in **Genesis 3**, comprising the offspring of the serpent—those opposed to God and characterized by moral wickedness. Throughout the synoptic gospels, whenever Jesus uses the term "*this generation*," He always uses it with a negative connotation, highlighting the moral depravity of those He describes.
- *It is important to recognize that Jesus consistently used the term "this generation" in a negative context, excluding Himself and His disciples from this categorization. Through His covenant He incorporated us as a new "chosen generation" and "His own special people," whom He called out of the darkness of "this generation" into marvelous light. The only instance where Jesus associated His disciples with "this generation" was in reference to their inability or unwillingness to cast out a demon.*

(Genesis 3:15 NIV) ***“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”***

(1 Peter 2:9-10 NIV) ***“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”***

(Luke 9:40-41 NASB) ***“And I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not.” 41 And Jesus answered and said, “You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you?”***

- b. The point Jesus is making here is that the "*spiritual generation*" that started in the Garden of Eden and is characterized by wickedness, ultimately culminating in the worship of the Antichrist, will not pass away (or be dealt with) until all the events He just described—signs of the times, including His return—take place. This wicked generation will also face judgment alongside the Antichrist and the False Prophet at the time of Jesus' second coming.

(Revelation 14:9-11 NASB) ***“Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”***

- c. Jesus emphasizes that although heaven and earth will pass away, His words will never pass away. To the first-century Jewish listener, nothing seemed more permanent than the heavens and the earth. Yet, Jesus makes one of the strongest claims of His ministry by asserting that His words are eternal outlasting Heaven and Earth. By doing so, He underscores the certainty of His predictions, assuring us that even the most challenging realities He described will indeed come to pass.

(Psalm 119:89 NASB) ***“Forever, Lord, your word stands in heaven.***

(Isaiah 40:8 NASB) ***“The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.***

III. The Day and Hour No One Knows

(Matthew 24:36 NASB) ***“But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”***

- a. First, there are significant interpretive challenges in determining the precise day and hour of His coming. Although there are numerous timing indicators provided, such as 70 weeks, 42 months, 1260 days, and a time, times, and half a time, unanswered questions make certainty elusive. For instance, should we use the 360-day prophetic year mentioned in scripture, or the literal 365-day calendar year? How literal should we take references to 3 ½ years—are they exact to the day and hour, and if so, in which time zone? These complexities highlight the difficulty of making precise predictions about His return even when significant timing indicators take place.
- b. Jesus wasn't suggesting that we should avoid discussing the end times simply because we do not know the exact day or hour of His return. In fact, the context of the verses before and after indicates quite the opposite. He emphasizes the importance of being prepared and vigilant, encouraging believers to remain watchful and engaged with the topic of His second coming.
- c. Finally, Jesus was not suggesting that He lacks omniscience or that He wasn't the Son of God. Rather, He was highlighting the voluntary limitations He accepted as part of His humanity. By choosing to "*empty Himself*" during His time on earth, Jesus demonstrated His willingness to embrace human limitations. His statement about not knowing the day or hour of His return simply highlights this humility. It is highly likely that in His glorified and resurrected state, Jesus now fully knows all the details related to His return, reflecting His divine nature and complete knowledge.

(Philippians 2:5-8 NASB) "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross."

IV. The Days of Noah

(Matthew 24:37-41 NASB) "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 At that time there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left."

- a. Jesus said that His coming would be "*just like the days of Noah*." During Noah's time, society was corrupted by widespread wickedness, including unsanctified spiritual activities (**Genesis 6:1-4**), sexual immorality, and violence. The people were oblivious to Noah's urgent preaching of righteousness, and their disregard led to them being taken by surprise by the flood of God's judgment. Similarly, Jesus warns that at the end of the age, people will be so lost in corruption and wickedness that they will be caught off guard by His judgement at the moment of His second coming.

(Genesis 6:5, 11-12 NASB) "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of mankind was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. 11 Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for humanity had corrupted its way upon the earth."

(2 Peter 2:5 NASB) "[God]... did not spare the ancient world, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly"

- b. The ones that Jesus says are "*taken*", aren't those that are raptured, but rather they are those that are taken to "*sudden judgment*" at the "*great feast of God*" where their bodies will be eaten by the birds of the air. To be "*taken*" in this context, is not a good thing.

(Luke 17:34-37 NASB) “I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. 35 There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. 36 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.” 37 And responding, they said to Him, “Where, Lord?” And He said to them, “Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered.”

(Revelation 17:17-19 NASB) “Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great feast of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, both free and slaves, and small and great.” 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse, and against His army.”

- c. The days of Noah were also marked by God’s favor for the righteous, His divine forewarning and also divine blueprints for the righteous to thrive during the hour of testing in an ark of safety. God's judgment did not take Noah and his family by surprise. Instead, they spent decades diligently preparing for the onset of God's judgment. When the time came, they had an ark of safety because of their unwavering dedication and obedience in preparing for the flood. Likewise, God is preparing us to be like Noah and prepare for the hour of His 2nd coming.

(Genesis 6:8-9 NASB) “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. 10...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.”

(Genesis 6:13-15 NASB) “Then God said to Noah, “The end of humanity has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of people; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. 14 Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you shall make it...”

(Genesis 7:1-5 NASB) “Then the Lord said to Noah, “Enter the ark, you and all your household, for you alone I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation. 2 You shall take with you seven pairs of every clean animal, a male and his female; and two of the animals that are not clean, a male and his female; 3 also of the birds of the sky, seven pairs, male and female, to keep their offspring alive on the face of all the earth. 4 For after seven more days, I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and I will wipe out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made.” 5 So Noah acted in accordance with everything that the Lord had commanded him.”