

Session 1. Overview: Knowing the Signs of the Times

We are beginning a new series called *Studies in the Signs of the Times*. This should be a very interesting series, and I trust that it will be invigorating to our faith, as we are currently in a season where our faith is stirred up. We are going to go through it slowly because there is so much information. My desire is not to just run through it but actually communicate it in a way where we grasp it. I want to communicate in a way that we can share it with other people because this is the type of material that we need to be able to share with people who have no idea what is going on. Much of the Church senses that something is up, but they do not have language for it. I encourage you to take these notes, study them, break them down, and make them your own.

INTRODUCTION

Roman numeral I. Paragraph A. Can we know with certainty that we are living in the generation of the Lord's return? The biblical answer is yes. How can we know this? The Scripture has so much information on this topic because God wants us to know with certainty the season, the signs, and the conditions surrounding Jesus' second coming. The Lord commands us to know it. It is actually the responsibility of the generation of believers in which the Lord returns to know the signs of the times. My premise is that we are in the beginning stages of the generation of the Lord's return. I do not know whether the final seven prophetic years will begin in five years or fifty years (probably closer to fifty than five).

I feel absolutely certain that we are in the time frame of His return; that might seem bold if you are unfamiliar with this subject. If you are familiar with the subject, the signs are so clear that they are shouting at anyone who is paying half attention. Part of the purpose of this teaching is to bring clarity to your heart and mind so that you can be bold about speaking this to other people.

JESUS PREACHING AT THE MOUNT OF OLIVES ON THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Paragraph B. The Olivet Discourse: that is a fancy term for Matthew 24 because Jesus is on the Mount of Olives. When you read commentaries, they will talk frequently about the Olivet Discourse. Matthew 24 is when Jesus spoke with the disciples on the end times. It gives the signs and conditions of the Lord's return with great detail. Why would Jesus give us such details, and then insist that no one will ever know the season of His coming? If you talk with many believers, they will say, "Well, you cannot know!" That is true! We cannot know the exact day, or hour; however, the Church is to know the season. You can be absolutely sure about that. Matthew 24:1: "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple." This was at the very end of His earthly ministry. He had just rebuked the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Matthew 23, which was the chapter and the event before this sermon. So Jesus departs from the temple having rebuked them. His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple because they were so magnificent. The Jerusalem temple was among the wonders of the ancient world. It was the most magnificent building on the earth, or one of the top ones.

Matthew 24:2: "And Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'" This was absolutely shocking. You have to really get into the disciples' understanding to discover how shocking Jesus' statement was. He asked if they could see the entire temple complex. Then, Jesus told them, "Not one stone shall be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down" (Mt. 24:2). This was unthinkable! The Jews assumed that God's favor was so focused on the temple that no matter what they did, the Jews thought that the temple would ensure God's protection and

favor. Jesus pointed His finger and said that the temple would be completely decimated. They could not imagine the implications of that.

MATTHEW 24:3: “WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN OF YOUR COMING?”

Matthew 24:3: “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when these things will be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” They asked for the sign of His coming, and Jesus ends up giving hosts of other signs, but He gives one primary sign. He gives them more than what they asked for. Matthew 24:4: “And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you.’” Jesus tells them not to be deceived in that hour; beloved, I believe we are in the beginning of that hour.

Luke 21:7-8 and Mark 13 also give another rendition of this. The Olivet Discourse is recorded in these two books as well. Luke 21:7-8: “So they asked Him, saying, ‘Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?’ And He said: ‘Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, “I am He,” and, “The time has drawn near.” Therefore, do not go after them.’” So Jesus gives the signs in order that we would know when His return is about to take place. These are signs that apply to the return of the Lord.

WHEN WILL THE TEMPLE BE DESTROYED, AND WHEN IS THE SECOND COMING?

Paragraph C. After Jesus prophesied that the temple was to be destroyed, the disciples asked two questions: first, when would the temple be destroyed? Second, what is the sign of the second coming and the end of the age? The complication in this passage is found in the fact that Jesus gives answers that apply to two different time frames; these two time frames overlap. This has given much occasion for scholars to debate with one another. They ask, “When will the temple be destroyed?” The answer is in 70 AD—forty years later. The second question is: when will the second coming be? That answer is in 2,000 years. So Jesus proceeds to answer moving in and out of the two time frames. He is talking about 70 AD, and Jesus describes what would occur within one generation. He gives a few sentences of information about when the temple would be destroyed. All the events that surround the destruction of the temple in 70 AD are prophetic foreshadows of events that will happen at the end of the age. This is why it is important to study this because as you begin to read commentaries or other books, one group might argue, “No, Matthew 24 is all about 70 AD when the temple was destroyed.”

The other guy will say, “No. It is not all about 70 AD. It is about now.”

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE IN 70 AD IS A PROPHETIC END-TIME PICTURE

The correct answer is: “Stop—you are both right.” Part of it is about 70 AD; each one of the events that happened in 70 AD is a prophetic picture of what is going to happen also at the end of the age. The group that wants to remove the subject of the end times, the Great Tribulation, and all the glory and trouble that is coming chooses to reduce the prophecies of Matthew 24 to the events of 70 AD. They say that it all happened 2,000 years ago, and nothing is going to happen in the future. They think that it has already been fulfilled because they do not understand that though Jesus did mention a little bit about 70 AD, He was giving the disciples a prophetic picture of what will again occur in Jerusalem at the end of the age. There will be great trouble again in Jerusalem.

THE BEGINNING OF THE BIRTH PAINS IN MATTHEW 24:4-8

Roman numeral II. Jesus goes on to describe the beginnings of the birth pang in Matthew 24:4-8: “And Jesus and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.’” In the New International Version or the New American Standard, the word *sorrows* is the word for *birth pangs*.

That is the first birth pang. It is most commonly translated as “these are the beginning of the birth pangs.” That is the way that I prefer to view that phrase because there are a number of passages in the Old Testament that discuss the birth pangs at the end of the age. Mark 13 gives another version of it; in Mark 13, Jesus adds another word. He adds another dimension in verse 8: “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.” In Mark 13:8, Jesus adds earthquakes, famines and troubles. So he adds this next category of troubles. Matthew does not talk about the troubles, but Mark adds the word troubles, which is very interesting.

MARK 13:5-8

Mark 13:5-8: “And Jesus, answering them began to say: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you.’ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He’ and will deceive many. But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.”

LUKE 21:9-18:

Luke goes on and adds four different dimensions that Mathew did not add. Mathew says there will be earthquakes, but Luke says that there will be great earthquakes. What difference does it make? I guess it depends on if you are there. There will be famines, pestilences, and fearful sights. Now that is an interesting sign of the times—fearful sights. Fearful sights are things that are terrifying to the eye, and there will be great signs from heaven.

Luke 21:9-18: “But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.’ Then He said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost.”

Some people think that there is a contradiction between these verses. First, it says that you will be betrayed and even killed, hated by all nations; but then it says that not one hair on your head will be lost. It does not mean

people will not be martyred, but Jesus is looking past the martyrdom. He is speaking about the age to come. He says literally every head on your head will be restored. You will not lose one thing in the transition. You will gain everything back. He is talking about the resurrection. Beloved, this is true for billions of years.

You will not lose one thing in obedience to Jesus suffering persecution. For a moment, we lose our life, but we gain our physical bodies back in the full grandeur and splendor of resurrected form. Every single hair on your head will be restored in glory and splendor. This was not a joke to Jesus; this was real to Jesus because He was going to die at the end of the week. He was expecting that every head on His head would be restored to Him. He believed this! This was real to Him, and it is real to us as well.

THE PERIOD OF TIME CALLED THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PAINS

Paragraph A. Jesus spoke of a specific period of time called the “beginning of birth pangs.” The Greek word “birth pangs” is translated as “sorrows” (NKJV). It is to be compared with the increasing trauma that a woman experiences during childbirth. This trauma will result in a new world order being birthed at the second coming otherwise known as the millennial kingdom at the second coming. So the earth is going to go through a period of trauma. I believe that it is wrong to consider that the birth pangs have gone on for 2,000 years. I believe the birth pangs are the final decades before the coming of the Lord, as the earth will come into trauma because it is birthing a new order. It is not just the trends of 2,000 years.

The twelve different trends that we have listed from these three different passages have all taken place for 2,000 years, but they are going to escalate, or accelerate in a way that is discernable. We will know like we know that we are at the beginning of the time of trauma that will birth a new world order at the second coming and the millennial kingdom.

TWELVE MAJOR WORLDWIDE TRENDS THAT ARE PROPHETIC SIGNS

Paragraph B. The beginning of the birth pangs refer to twelve major worldwide trends that are to be discerned and understood as prophetic signs to help the Church prepare for increased pressure. We are supposed to teach these twelve and pay attention to their marked increase in the decades right before His return, so that we would have assurance that we are in the generation of His return. They are not just general trends for 2,000 years. These are signs to awaken us to confidence that the Lord is coming. Birth pangs are not something a woman has all of her life; she has them right before the baby is born. She has this as a sign of great transition. Each one of these signs has gone on for 2,000 years, but they have not been signs for 2,000 years. It is the discernable escalation of these twelve together that give us the confidence that we are in a different timeframe. I want to encourage you to take these twelve and begin to study them; begin to research them and find out data.

FALSE CHRISTS, WARS, AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS

The number one category that will have a discernible increase and marked acceleration is the amount of false christs. Number two is wars. Number three is ethnic conflicts, which is nation against nation, or ethnos against ethnos. Nation against nation is not just political entities; it is ethnic groups against ethnic groups. They are not political entities—it is people groups. Economic warfare is kingdom against kingdom, which is more than just military. The nations are already at war right now, and the main weapon today is money. Nations want to undermine and take from one another through economic maneuvering and pressures.

FAMINES, PESTILENCES, AND EARTHQUAKES

The next one is famines and then pestilences. This word pestilence is a little unnerving as most of these are unnerving. The thing that is going on around the news about the bird flu; they are talking about preparing for perhaps the greatest pestilence in human history. Some are not sure that it is going to that level, but others are thinking it is very possible. I am talking about major governmental, presidential type of levels around the world. The reports are going out everywhere. The news media is a little shy about it, although they are talking about it. But the websites of major governments, as well as powerful economic businesses and entities are addressing these subjects. You should take a look at it.

COMMOTIONS, FEARFUL SIGHTS, GREAT SIGNS FROM HEAVEN, AND PERSECUTION

Earthquakes, commotions, fearful sights, great signs from heaven, and persecution will also increase (Mt. 24:4-8; Mk. 13:5-8, Lk. 21:7-18). Matthew gives seven major tenses; Mark adds “trouble,” and Luke describes four more: “commotion, fearful sights, great signs from heaven, and persecution.”

MATTHEW 24 AND 1 THESSALONIANS 5:2-3

Paragraph C. We are going to compare Matthew 24 with 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3: “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.” When you look at the words of Paul, we see that there are three distinct prophetic time frames related to the final seven-year period at the end of this age. We spent an entire session on this, and most of you are aware of it.

There are three distinct time frames that are related to the final seven years of this age. I believe we are in the first one called the beginning of birth pangs. You need to understand these three time frames and their relationship with each other, although we are not going to spend time on it tonight. We need to study these, so that you can have a sense of which one of these signs fit in with the time frames. Some of the birth pangs occur through all three time frames; we are operating now in the first one. The first time frame is called the beginning of birth pangs. You can picture that as in the analogy of a woman giving birth to a child. Things are beginning to be troubled. She is very aware that something is about to happen really soon. It is not business as usual. I believe that the nations of the earth are becoming more aware that something is up—trouble is in the land. There is an atmosphere around the globe that things are becoming dangerous on the planet.

Second, there will be a worldwide period of counterfeit peace and safety. Suddenly things are going to go forward seemingly, but there will be counterfeit and deception (1 Thes. 5:2-3; Dan. 9:27). The nations of the earth will be crying out for peace and safety. So there is going to be a sense of reprieve, but it is a counterfeit peace and safety. This is where the Church really gets into trouble because the nations will cry peace and safety.

PEACE AND SAFETY

Peace means in terms of international conflict; safety means in terms of terrorism, pestilence, and earthquakes. They think finally safety is arriving. We will be the only people who will, by the authority of the Word of God, and through the Holy Spirit, boldly proclaim that it is a counterfeit. We will boldly say, “Peace and safety is the work of darkness—the work of Satan.”

The nations will be very unhappy with that appraisal of the Church. They will get angry and say, “This is the first time the earth has ever had peace and all you Christians can say is, “It’s of the devil!” This will really be a time of great trouble for the Church. There will be peace and safety for the world, although it is short-lived for three and a half years. We could call this the period of increased birth pangs.

THE PERIOD OF INCREASED BIRTH PANGS

The powers of darkness are setting things into place that will bring the greatest trouble ever. It is in this time of peace and safety where Satan, the Antichrist, and those who are in alliance with them will be at work. They will be very focused and energetic to get things in place in order to bring control over the nations of the earth to fulfill Satan’s purposes. That is why we call it the increased birth pangs. It is not the beginning; things are worse, although they do not appear worse to the uninstructed eye.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Third, the Great Tribulation (heavy birth pangs in Mt. 24:21 and Jer. 30:5-7) will occur in the final three and a half years. The final seven-year period of this age has two parts each lasting three and a half years. The counterfeit peace and safety lasts for three and a half years, and the Great Tribulation also lasts for three and a half years.

The final seven years begins when the Antichrist makes a covenant that will “guarantee” Israel political, economic, and spiritual prosperity along with protection. The Great Tribulation period starts with the Antichrist establishing a counterfeit peace that lasts approximately three and a half years. This counterfeit peace will seem to change the world for good.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3: “When they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains”—the Great Tribulation—“upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.” Matthew 24:21: “For then there will be Great Tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

Paragraph D. The Scripture says that this generation will not pass away when all of this takes place. A generation in Scripture ranges from forty to eighty years from the biblical point of view (Num. 32:13; Ps. 90:10). You will read some accounts of this, and some are dogmatic that a biblical generation is forty years. That is not true. A biblical generation is up to eighty years. It is a lifespan of a human being. You can read a little more on that. A generation is not forty years; some of them are but not all. For example, there are nearly 1,000 years in the fourteen generations from Abraham to David (averaging over seventy years for each generation). Matthew 1:17: “The generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations.”

ISRAEL IS THE PROPHETIC TIME CLOCK FOR THE END TIMES

Paragraph E. My opinion is that the beginning of birth pangs began in either 1948 (when Israel became a nation), or 1967 (when Jerusalem came under Jewish control). If I had to pick one, I believe the beginning of the birth pangs began in 1948. Israel is the reference point for understanding God’s redemptive history (past and future).

When we want to understand God's timetable and God's clock, we look at Israel; we do not look at the nations. Israel is the reference point and the centerpiece of God's strategy. Jesus will return to Israel, and He will rule all the nations of the earth from Jerusalem. Remember that in 70 AD, when the temple was destroyed, Israel went into exile. Then for the next 2,000 years from 70 AD to 1948, Israel did not have a homeland. The end-times prophecies are clear that Israel had to be back in their homeland; they had to be a national entity, and they had to have control of the city of Jerusalem. This was an impossible concept. It seemed from these prophecies that the end times cannot happen, as many of the signs of the times require that the Jews be back in Jerusalem for the prophecies to be fulfilled. Many of the signs have to do with Jews in the land; therefore, if they are not in the land, how can it be a sign?

We will spend an entire evening on all the signs related to Israel. There is a pretty extensive list of things that have to happen in the nation if Israel for it to be the final generation. The first thing that had to happen is that they had to become a nation. This is staggering! No nation has ever maintained a national identity for over forty years without a homeland, and Israel did it for two thousand years. That is a miracle of history. Another miracle equally as great is the fact that they got a homeland back in Israel. When that happened, the prophetic timetable or clock in heaven began to tick again; now, we begin to pick up on the divine calendar.

Twenty years after Israel became a nation in 1948, the Jews took control of Jerusalem in 1967. They do not have perfect and full control; that is why the Dome of the Rock is still there. They have to pay attention to the Islamic powers. That is why they cannot build their temple. They do not have total freedom and control, but they have substantial control over the city. You will know when they will have complete control over the city because they will build their temple there. Right now, there are check and balances; there are some hindrances that are stopping them.

The three most significant prophetic dates before the Great Tribulation are 1948 (rebirth of the nation of Israel), 1967 (recapturing the city of Jerusalem), and the Antichrist's peace treaty with Israel and other nations (Dan. 9:27).

RECOGNIZABLE SIGNS OF THE TIMES INSTEAD OF GENERAL TRENDS

Paragraph F. If people take end-time prophecy seriously, they will see the birth pangs as recent. If they see end-times prophecy as symbolic, most see the birth pangs happening over 2,000 years—just general trends that happened through history. It is a very common position by scholars. However, the birth pangs must be recognizable signs that cause the Church to know that Jesus' coming is near and causes us to watch, pray, and observe. Matthew 24:33-34: "So you, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!"—the second coming—"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."

We have to be able to recognize these birth pangs to conclude that Jesus is coming right away, so it cannot be trends for 2,000 years because there is no recognizable thing in the 2,000-year trend that makes us believe that the coming of the Lord is right at the door.

Paragraph G. I did a little bit of work on this and got some help from some others. This is the ratio of birth pangs to the heavy labor. The average ratio is twelve hours to one hour, and my point of this is that the beginning of birth pangs could not be a 2,000-year period, and then the heavy labor is three and a half years of the Great Tribulation. The ratio would not be parallel at all to the analogy of a woman having a child. It would

be a woman having birth pangs for twenty-four years, and then having heavy labor for the final hour. I assure you that the birth pangs are not trends for 2,000 years. Scholars like that because they can just make all the signs blend into history, so there is nothing to get excited about and nothing to be stirred up by right now. Scholars say, “Today is just like yesterday, and that is how many prefer it, but it is not true;” the Spirit of God wants us to aware that we are in a critical hour in Church history, and we need to be alarmed and alert to the great revival, and the great trouble that is about to break into the human experience.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION IS THE PRIMARY SIGN OF THE END TIMES

Roman numeral III. The abomination of desolation is the primary sign of the end times. Remember back in Matthew 24:3, the disciples wanted to know what is the sign of Jesus’ coming? The nations will know that He is just a moment away by the signs of His coming, which is the abomination of desolation, in the last three and a half years.

When Israel becomes a nation, we started paying attention. When Israel got control of the city of Jerusalem in 1967, we were really paying attention. When the abomination of desolation takes place, this is the most significant political and religious sign to take place. It is a very negative one. What is it?

THE POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

Paragraph A. The sign of the abomination of desolation has many significant implications. We all need to understand the abomination of desolation; it is the most significant political and spiritual sign to take place. There are many significant ones, but this one stands in a category of its own. When this takes place, we are at the very final moments of the three and a half years. The entire world can know that it is the end of the age, if they care to know. Nobody has to be tricked because this sign of the abomination of desolation is so dramatic, unprecedented, and bizarre. No one would even guess that this take place. There can be no mistaking that this is what Jesus said it is: it is an abomination that will lead to the desolation of nations of the earth—the Great Tribulation.

MATTHEW 24:15-22

Matthew 24:15-22: “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place’ (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.”

We will see it through media, but there will be a worldwide event when this takes place. The nations of the earth will see this happen; they will see it. What Jesus said: “This is the abomination of desolation that Daniel prophesied about five times,” it was as if Jesus was saying, “You need to be familiar with Daniel to understand what I am talking about.” The apostles were familiar with Daniel.

THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Paragraph B. The abomination of desolation is something standing in the holy place—the temple in Jerusalem. There is going to be something standing in temple of the holy place, and it is an image, or idol of the Antichrist.

Jesus said trouble is about to break forth across the earth like no time in history when this happens. He says, “Let the reader understand this,” which means that Mathew is exhorting us to understand the book of Daniel. He is pausing here and saying you have to understand what this is, and it is simple concept. We all need to understand it and be aware of it. When this thing takes place: when the image of the Antichrist, an idol, a statue is placed in the temple of Jerusalem, when the Antichrist walks into the temple himself to establish and install this image, the Antichrist will declare himself as God. He will stand in there with this world leader; many will like the Antichrist because he brought world peace and safety. He will say, “I have a new announcement! It is now the hour to tell you who I really am.”

People will ask, “Who are you, great one?”

He will answer, “I am God!”

The nations will shudder, “You are who?”

He will answer, “I am God!”

One part of the human race will celebrate the Antichrist declaring himself as God; another part will have trepidation. They will be unsure, and we will be very clear. This is the devil incarnate standing in the temple of Jerusalem. It is great trouble because when he says he is God, it does not end there. Next, the Antichrist says, “I am God, and whoever does not worship me will be put to death.”

THE ANTICHRIST DEMANDS THE WORSHIP OF THE WORLD, OR THEY WILL BE KILLED

The Antichrist will not just say, “I am God!” He does not leave it there. He says, “I am God, and I demand everyone to worship me,” and he puts his statue in the temple. Jesus said in Matthew 24:21-22: “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, those days will be shortened.”

That does not mean no one would be born again, but it means no physical life would be spared. Even the elect would die; the entire human race would physically die premature deaths if this time were not shortened to three and a half years. The carnage, the rage of darkness, and the zeal of God’s wrath would be too great. The Antichrist is a demonized man who has a very mysterious origin but is fully man. He is in full alliance with Satan. He says, ‘If you do not worship me, I will destroy you.’

God says, “If you do worship him, I will destroy you.” That is why the destruction is so widespread. His claim is the ultimate abomination, but it leads to desolation on two counts. The people who refuse to worship the Antichrist will be destroyed. It is the abomination that leads to the destruction of the human race.

He says, “I am God”; hundreds of millions will say no, and then he will say, “I will kill you.” Hundreds and hundreds of millions will say yes to the Antichrist and God says, “I will kill them.” That is what the book of Revelation is about. God pours his wrath out on the people who say yes to worship of the Antichrist. It brings destruction to the human race from two different angles. It is the abdominal act that brings destruction to the human race and the earth. God’s zeal will not draw back from judging all who say yes to Satan. Satan’s zeal is such that he will demand that all say yes to him.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION IS WHEN THE ANTICHRIST SAYS HE IS GOD

Paragraph B. The Abomination of Desolation will occur when the Antichrist declares himself to be God.

DEATH BY THE ANTICHRIST OR BY GOD

Paragraph E. The desolation will occur in two different ways. First, the Antichrist will seek to desolate or destroy any who refuse to worship him. Second, God will desolate or destroy in judgment all those who yield to the pressure to worship the Antichrist. The abomination of desolation is referred to seven times in Scripture: five times by Daniel (Dan. 8:13; 9:26, 27; 11:31; 12:11), and two times by Jesus (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14).

THE COMMAND TO KNOW THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Roman numeral IV. Jesus gives us a command to know the signs of the times. Paragraph A. The subject of the signs of the times is greatly neglected by the Body of Christ. Many Scriptures emphasize how important prophetic signs are at the end of the age. In Scripture, Jesus taught more than any of the apostles on our need to discern the times. Paul talked about it; Peter talked about it, and Jesus talked on it. He also gave severe rebukes to those who did not pay attention to the prophetic signs that pointed to His second coming. Whether the first coming or the second coming, there are always prophetic signs because it is Jesus coming to the planet; Jesus is announced from heaven.

There are signs in the Scriptures. There are signs that are in the heavens. There are miracles happening on the earth, and Jesus requires His people to know when He is coming. He required it the first time, and He is requiring it the second time. The signs are clear to anybody who has a genuine heart and love for the Word of God. If they will give themselves to the Word and say yes to God with no other agenda, they want what God wants. It is unmistakable whether it is at the first coming or the second coming. The signs are clearly in the Scriptures: miracles are taking place in society, signs occur in the heavens, and all kinds of unusual events are taking place.

Paragraph B. God promised to give prophetic signs in the generation that the Lord returns as an expression of His mercy. People can make the necessary preparations for what is coming. Prophetic signs serve the Church like a weather station that signals coming trouble like the tsunami in Southeast Asia. If the weather stations had given the warnings, some lives would have been spared. The example of the Southeast Asia tsunami caused by the Sumatra earthquake on December 26, 2004, illustrates this. My point is that when the warning is given, lives are really saved, and God is giving warnings to the planet. Much of the Church is not paying attention and do not know what the signs are.

Let's imagine that you are not going to look at any more of this paper, you are not going to take the next eight weeks to cover this, and somebody asks you, "What are five, or ten of the main signs?" Most sincere, "I love you Jesus," believers would say, "I don't know. There will be something about Israel. Something about wars and rumors of wars; I remember that one. Earthquakes I remember that one. Let me see . . . famine! I remember that one too." Most believers are completely unaware. It is like the weather station, and no one is paying attention to it. The Scripture has given the signs very clearly, but most believers are not aware of it all. My point is not to make you feel badly. My point is to make you have a determination in your heart that it is not going to be like that next year. When somebody asks me in a few weeks or few months, I am going to have some

answers. Beloved, I want to know that I know. I do not want to take your word for it. I want to know that I know this is the most significant hour in human history. It is not a good time to be biblically illiterate about the signs. It is the time to be informed.

WE WILL COME UNDER JUDGMENT IF WE DO NOT KNOW THE TIME OF VISITATION

Paragraph C. Jesus taught that Israel came under judgment for being unresponsive to God because they did not know the time of their visitation from God. The same principle is true of the second coming. Many in Israel will come under great judgment because they will not know the signs of His second coming; this parallels 2,000 years ago, they did not know the signs of the first coming. Luke 19:41-44: “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’”

Jesus was saying, “If you would have known what was going on and why I am here; if you would have paid attention to the prophets, you would be ready.” In Luke 19, Jesus is talking about the 70 AD with the destruction when the Roman army comes to Jerusalem and completely wipes out Jerusalem. But beloved, the armies of the earth are coming to Jerusalem again at the end of the age. The spirit of this thing is going to be replayed at the end meaning that the armies of the earth are going to gather around Jerusalem again. It says in Zechariah 12-14 that the same storyline is going to be retold again.

WE MUST KNOW THE TIME OF VISITATION

Luke 19:43: “For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side”—this is 70AD—“and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.” Jesus is saying that if you had known the time of your visitation; that God was preparing to visit you, you would have prepared and responded very differently, but you were completely unaware of the hour of your visitation. Many in Israel in this very moment are completely unaware that Jesus of Nazareth is preparing to return again to Jerusalem. Beloved, there is a universal sense that the Lord is coming, but it is not enough just to know that He is coming. We want to know the good and the bad, what to believe for, what to resist, what to gird our strength with, and prepare to endure. We want to have understanding when the signs are so clear.

DURING WORLD WAR II, MANY CHRISTIANS WERE DECEIVED AND FELL AWAY

Corrie ten Boom lived in Europe during the Nazi regime. After she was freed from the prison camps, she said that the Church told the people in Germany that all would be fine. The Church told people that trouble was not coming. Billy Graham brought her around the world, and she told people that most of the Church fell away in Germany under the pressures of the Nazi regime. They were completely unprepared for it; many thought God was raising up Adolf Hitler to restore their economy, to bless their homes and families, and give them liberty.

The majority of the Church leaders were in support of Adolf Hitler because of the great economic gains and the national honor that was being restored. They were telling the people that good times were coming. When it happened exactly opposite of what they believed, many of the people fell sway to Hitler. Others fell from the

Lord because they did not trust God's Word. They heard God's Word preached wrongly; they heard blessing, yet there was great trouble. They said that we cannot even trust God because His Word is not true. Of course, they were misinformed in what they believed, but they blamed God anyway.

WE ARE COMMANDED TO KNOW THE GENERATION OF THE LORD'S RETURN

Paragraph D. Jesus commanded us to know the generation of the Lord's return. He commands us to. Here is what Jesus said in Matthew 24:32. This is the Olivet Discourse, which is the main chapter of the end times. Matthew 24:32-44: "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. 'But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.' But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

In other words, the fig tree's leaves are gone in the winter time and all of a sudden the leaves begin to grow; there are these emerging signs that are happening on the fig tree you know that the summer is coming in just a few minutes. You know the harvest is right around the corner. In Matthew 24, we are instructed that you have to be able to discern the signs of the times; they will be seen and understood by the people of God. We must know that it is near—at the doors! Beloved, these signs are given so we can know. Jesus says, "I want you to learn this parable, and I want you to know that My coming is near when you see with your eyes what the Bible says are the signs of the times."

In Matthew 24:36, Jesus warns us that we will not know the day and the hour, but we can know the season without knowing the day and the hour. Often we take these verses about the day and the hour, and we say we cannot know the day and the hour. However, we slip into thinking that we cannot know the season. We kind of accidentally change the words. Jesus said that you have to know that I am coming near. You must know the season.

WE WILL KNOW THE TIMES AND SEASONS

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6: Paul says the Church will know the times and seasons. We do not know the day or the hour at this time, but we must know the times and seasons. We are commanded to. Paragraph E. The Church will look up, and lift their heads in encouragement knowing Jesus is coming soon. Luke 21, Matthew 24, and Mark 13 are all parallel passages. It is the same event told from slightly different angles. Here, Luke adds a few words that Matthew did not record.

LUKE 21:28-31

Luke 21:28-31: "When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads,"—be encouraged—"because your redemption draws near." In other words when these things begin to happen, look up; do not be downcast because the second coming of Jesus will be very soon, which is our redemption. So here is the

question: when they happen, will you be able to recognize them, look up, and be encouraged that the Son of God is about to step into human history again? The answer is yes.

Luke 21:29: “Then He spoke to them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.’ Beloved, you need to know for yourself; it is not enough that I know, as I cannot know for you. You have to know for yourself that when you see these things with your eyes, you have instructed understanding. You have clarity from the Word of God, so we know what we are looking for when we see the signs. We know for ourselves that the summer is near, which means the second coming.

Luke 21:31: “So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.” To know is a command; Jesus is instructing us that the millennial kingdom is near and about to appear on the earth. God’s kingdom is on the earth now but in a very limited form. God’s kingdom is on the earth in a complete form starting at the second coming.

People say, “But, you cannot know!”

I say, “Absolutely, you can know! Jesus commands us to know when the kingdom is near because we observe what the Scripture has said we should be paying attention to.”

LUKE 12:54-56:

Paragraph F. Jesus rebukes the people for being able to read weather signs while being unable to interpret the prophetic signs of His first coming. Luke 12:54-56: “Then He also said to the multitudes, ‘Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west’”—Mediterranean Sea—“‘immediately you say, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow,’”—Negev desert area—“‘you say, ‘There will be hot weather’; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?’”

He is rebuking them basically, saying, “You are My people, and you cannot tell what time you are living in, and I, God, am in your midst.” Jesus will require that His people can discern the time. This is an important point to Jesus in that generation. It was not just that this is recorded; this was recorded long after those people were gone. By the time the gospel of Luke was written, the leaders he was talking to were mostly already dead. This was written for us so that the mistake is not repeated. It was not written for the benefit of the leaders who were there because it was written some decades later. This account was written for the people of God so the mistake is not repeated when Jesus come the second time.

MATTHEW 16:1-4

Matthew 16:1-4: “The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, ‘When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.’ And he left them and departed.”

He was giving them signs on the earth; Jesus was raising the dead, casting out demons, healing the sick, and all kinds of signs had already happened in the heavens. Choirs sang at His birth and the wise men, the star, and angels appeared. The audible voice of God spoke from heaven, but they wanted another sign from heaven on their own terms. It was not that they wanted a sign; it was the fact they wanted a sign above and beyond the ones He was committed to give them. When God's people cannot discern the signs of the times, it is troubling to God's heart.

ASKING FOR A SIGN IS A LEGITIMATE REQUEST AS JOEL PROPHESED THIS

Paragraph G. Asking for a sign was a legitimate request because Joel prophesied that the Messiah would give signs from heaven in Joel 2:30-32. In hypocrisy, they were seeking signs beyond those done by Jesus and given by Scripture with the intention of testing God. Jesus' miracles were signs to bear witness of Him (Jn. 5:36). In one way, it was okay for them to ask for signs, but He had already given them signs; He raised people from the dead and all the other miracles. They were testing Him as hypocrites. They did not really want to know; they were trying to get Him to prove Himself to them in a way that was outside of the will of God.

GOD EXPECTS HIS PEOPLE TO DISCERN WHAT THE PROPHETS SAY ABOUT TIMES

Paragraph H. God expects His people to discern what the prophets say in the hour in which they live. If we neglect the strategic information that God gives us, then we are considered foolish and slow of heart. Here are the disciples on the road to Emmaus; these are really good guys who love God. Jesus appears to them. It is as if they say, "Hey, haven't you heard what is going on in Jerusalem? They killed a great prophet named Jesus." Jesus is resurrected and walking with them. Beloved, it does not get any better than when Jesus preaches Jesus. Here is Jesus talking about Himself, and they are not getting what is going on, but here is the part that troubles me. I do not want this to be true of me. Jesus said in Luke 24:25: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" He is saying, "You foolish ones; you slow of heart, do you not understand that it is already written in the book what is supposed to happen?" These guys were on the road, enjoying all the excitement around Jerusalem, but they did not grasp, or take time to know what the prophets said.

ARGUMENTS AND LIES AGAINST THE KNOWING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Roman numeral V. Paragraph A. Lie number one: Some people say that we cannot understand the signs of the times because no one else can. Their excuse is, "Why even try to know the signs of the times?" The scriptures on the end times were written to be understood by all, since they were written for all. The majority of people throughout history have been uneducated peasants. It is not true that the end-time scriptures are too complicated. You can understand it.

Paragraph B. Lie number two: some think that understanding the end times will minimize the work of the kingdom. If we get into that, we will quit doing the work of the kingdom. I never met anyone who approached the end times in a biblical way that did not become more zealous for prayer, harvest, giving his or her money, and bearing hardship.

Paragraph C. Lie number three: it will all pan out in the end. We need to ask, "How is it going to pan out for you?" It is true that God's purposes will take place, but it may go bad for you and your family. Will it pan out well with your loved ones? It will only go well, if we are prepared in that hour.

Paragraph D. Lie number four: there is not enough information on the signs of the generation of the Lord's return. There is plenty of knowability of the end times, which is something that Jesus and Paul were adamant about. There is more prophetic evidence about Jesus' coming than any other prophetic event in the Bible. You must know that He is right at the door when these things happen.

Paragraph E. Lie number five: it is too much to understand. Why even try? It is not that there is not enough information, but there is too much that it is just too daunting. There is too much; so why even bother with it? Beloved, this is doable. God gave this information not just for scholars to grasp, but also for everyone in the kingdom.

Paragraph F. Lie number six: it is not practical or helpful to talk about the signs of the times. The truth is that people draw back because of the fear of man. It is not politically correct to study the end of the age. There is a man-pleasing spirit on the Church that does not want to address this issue. It is extreme; it is out there, and people do not like it. It embarrasses them. They do not want to take a stand for it, and bear the reproach of what God says. We can love Jesus, but we do not want to get too much into His plan. Loving Jesus can keep us a little bit neutral until we get practical about getting involved in His plans. Imagine the when there is world peace, and we are saying it is of the Devil; you cannot be more politically incorrect in the Church than that hour in church history.

Paragraph G. Lie number seven: that every generation believed that they were the last one. It is a common misperception that most generations believed that they were in the end times. It is true that a very small group (probably less than 1 percent) of every generation thought they were at the end. Only twice in human history has there been a universal sense that it was the end of the age. These two times were in the generation of the early apostles, and this one (over 50 million books in the *Left Behind* book series have been sold). There was always some guy on a mountain who thought it, but 99 percent had no sense that it was the final days.

WE CAN KNOW THE EXACT DAY: 1,260 DAYS FROM THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION
Roman numeral VI. A most common argument is that nobody can know the day or the hour. We are not talking about the day or the hour right now. However, once the abomination of desolations take place, it is clear the day the Lord will return. It is 1,260 days after the abomination of desolation. John and Daniel said that we would know the day—not the hour—but the day of His coming.

Two thousand years ago, we could not know the day; today, nobody knows the day, but I assure you from the prophets, from Daniel and John, that we will know the day. When we get right down to the wire and the Antichrist marches into that temple, you can mark the day. It is 1,260 days from the abomination of desolation, and Jesus will visit the earth—that is universally understood by students of prophecy. It is true that we cannot know the day and the hour for 2,000 years, but there is coming a day when we will know. Jesus did not say you never would know; He just said you cannot know at that time. I want to encourage people not to worry about the day and the hour. It will be clear during the last three and a half years. We can know the season. Matthew 24:36: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

THE LORD LOVES TO TELL HIS PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY HIS PROPHETS

Roman numeral VII. God's nature is to communicate His heart with His people. When trouble was coming all through the Old Testament, God always told His people. It is inconceivable that God would not make the

greatest trouble in the history known to His people. Amos 3:7: “Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants, the prophets.”

THE PROPHETIC SPIRIT CAREFULLY SEEKS MORE UNDERSTANDING

Roman numeral VIII. The prophetic spirit carefully seeks more understanding. The prophets in the days of old searched carefully their own prophecies to find out what time and manner of time that Jesus was coming. Can you imagine Isaiah prophesied under the anointing, and then Isaiah took his own prophecies out, prayed, and fasted that he would understand them?

It says that the prophets inquired and searched out carefully what time the Spirit was indicating. Beloved, we want to be like the prophets of old. God wants us to search out what manner of activity and what season the Lord is speaking. He wants us to search it out through the Word of God and through the Holy Spirit in seeking Him in prayer and fasting. He wants the same prophetic spirit that was on the prophets to be on us. Peter was honoring the prophets and saying we want to be like these guys.

1 PETER 1:10-11

1 Peter 1:10-11, “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”

I really want to encourage you this week to go and look at these verses if you are unfamiliar with them. We will build on this next week and take it to the next level. I am going to assume that you have these fundamental ideas. So get into some discussion; we have about fifty E-12 groups, so sign up for one. They are little group discussions on the end times. If you are not in one, just grab three or four people and say, “Hey, we are not going to wait on the E-12. We are just going to start having coffee once a week and start talking about this stuff. Let’s figure out if this stuff is right or wrong. Remember what Jesus said: He said you have to know for yourself if this thing is right.”

Father, we come before You, and we ask you to touch our spirits even now. We are going to give ourselves to the Lord for a few moments.