

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 10 August 2025. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## The Birth Pangs of Judgment

### Matthew 24:1-8

When I was growing up, there was a song that my family often sang when we gathered around the piano. In fact, this song was my dad's personal favourite. (I remember his singing it around the house often.) The first verse and chorus went like this: "Years of time have come and gone since I first heard it told how that Jesus would come again someday; if back then it seemed so real, then I just can't help but feel how much closer His coming is today. Signs of the times are everywhere; there's a brand-new excitement in the air. Keep your eyes upon the eastern sky; lift up your head—your redemption draweth nigh!"

It has been more than four decades since I first heard that song; but I can honestly say that Christ's coming is no less real to me today than it was back then. In fact, as I see the tide of satanic evil that is crashing down on our world, Christ's coming is on my mind more than it ever was before. Sad to say, though, there are Christians who have become weary of waiting for Christ's coming; and they don't think much about it at all. There are pastors who preached on it years ago, but who now barely mention it. In fact, there are pastors who won't touch on the subject of *prophecy* at all—especially if it be prophecy of end-times events (the Rapture, the Tribulation, Christ's return to earth, or the 1,000-year Kingdom). Brethren, this ought not to be! It is estimated that **one fourth** (perhaps even **one third**) of the content of Scripture is prophecy. Of course, much of this content has to do with events that have *already* come to pass (including the 300-some prophecies of Christ's *first* coming to earth); but the greater part of the prophecies in Scripture have to do with the events leading up to, and following, **Christ's Second Coming to earth**. If God spent that much time foretelling the events that will surround Christ's Second Coming, then He obviously wants us to take them to heart, and live in expectation of them.

This morning, we'll be delving into one of the most important prophetic passages in the entire Bible—**Matthew chapters 24 and 25**. This passage is often called "**The Olivet Discourse**"; and it is the longest prophetic message that Jesus ever taught. In this passage, Christ was answering some questions that the disciples had asked Him. First, the disciples wanted to know *when* the destruction of the Temple would be. (Jesus had just told them that the Temple would be destroyed; so naturally, they wanted to know *when* this horrible event would happen.) Secondly, since Jesus kept telling them that He was "coming back" someday, they wanted to know what "**sign**" to look for, to let them know that His return was near. Also, they wanted to know what the sign of the "**end of the world**" will be. Little did they know what a long and detailed answer they would get! It was as though Jesus was saying, "I thought you'd never ask!"

Folks, the questions that the disciples asked Jesus are extremely important; and we need to study Jesus' answer, and know it inside and out. Why? *Because the King is coming*: and

when your heart is filled with the truth that the King is coming, it will have a profound impact on the way you live your life. If you are not saved, then the things you'll be hearing this morning should compel you to *run to Christ*, and receive His gift of salvation while you can. If you are saved already, these truths should compel you to keep your life pure, so that you won't be ashamed when Christ returns, and you stand before your King. The title of this message is ***The Birth Pangs of Judgment.***

**Read Matthew 24:1-14.**

## **I. The destruction of the Temple (vv. 1-3)**

In our study of **Matthew 21-23**, we read about the many things that Jesus said to His disciples, and to the religious leaders, while He was teaching in the Temple. All day long, the Pharisees had been throwing questions at Jesus, to try to get Him to say something amiss, so that they could discredit Him; but every single time, Jesus silenced them with His answers. Finally, Jesus looked these hypocritical men in the eyes, and pronounced woe upon them. He warned them that unless they repented of their sin, and cleaned the *inside* of the "cup," they would not escape the damnation of hell. Yet, despite His stern words, Jesus' heart was breaking for them —and for the nation. He began to weep over their rebellion; and as He wept, He addressed the people of Jerusalem. He told them that their "**house**" (meaning the Temple) was left to them "**desolate**," and that they will not see Him again until the day when they finally say, "**Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD.**"

From that day forward, God's House truly was desolate, because Israel's God, the Lord Jesus Christ, had forsaken it. Now, Jesus did stay in the Temple a short while longer that day. One of the last groups of people to whom Jesus spoke, as He was exiting the Temple, was a band of Greeks, who had travelled all the way to Israel to meet Him. He told these young Gentile believers that very soon, He would fall to the ground like a kernel of wheat, and die; but he assured them that through His death, He would defeat the prince of this world, Satan, and provide salvation for all mankind. However, when Jesus left the Temple that evening, He left it for good. Jesus never stepped into the Temple again; and He *won't* step into the Temple again until He returns to earth, *rebuilds* the Temple, and sits down in it as King and Priest.

Now, as Jesus and the disciples were walking out of the Temple, one of the disciples commented on the beauty of the Temple. To be sure, the Temple was magnificent. It was overlaid with white marble, gold, and jewels; and it was the pride of the Jewish people. However, Jesus wasn't impressed by its beauty; and a short while later, as they were sitting on the Mount of Olives just outside Jerusalem, Jesus dropped a bombshell on them. He said, "**See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.**"

Can you imagine the shock that must have come over the disciples? As they looked at that enormous structure, gleaming away in the sunset, they probably couldn't think of anything more unlikely than its being destroyed. *Who* would destroy it? The Romans? Why would the Romans want to destroy something that *they themselves* had been building and beautifying for nearly 90 years? Yet, Jesus clearly was *not* speaking figuratively. Jesus said that *not one stone* would be left upon another! There's no way to "allegorise" that! Israel had rejected their Messiah; and God will not dwell in a House in which the "worshippers" blaspheme His name.

Now, as the disciples began to get over their initial shock, they finally mustered the courage to ask, ***"When shall these things be?"*** In other words, "*When* will the Temple be destroyed?" Jesus never gave a date for when this will happen; but He did give them more details about it. Matthew didn't record these details in his Gospel; but Luke did. Let's look at Luke's Gospel.

**Read Luke 21:5-11, 20-28.**

In this passage, Jesus was foretelling of two distinct future events. These two events are separated by many centuries; yet, Jesus lumped them together, as though they were one. Now, this is not unusual. In the Scriptures, God *often* blended prophecies of near and far future events. For example, the Old Testament prophets often put the prophecies of the Messiah's first and second comings side-by-side. Oftentimes they would speak of a *suffering* Messiah, who would die for our sins; but in the next breath, they would speak of a *conquering* Messiah, who will destroy Israel's enemies, and reign over the whole world. Now, *after* Jesus died, and rose from the grave, and ascended back to Heaven, Jesus' followers were able to look back at the prophecies of Scripture, and see that all along, God had been foretelling of *two* comings of the Messiah. Jesus came the *first* time to die for our sins; and He will come again the *second* time to set up a worldwide Kingdom of peace and righteousness.

So, with this in mind, what are the two future events that Jesus is foretelling here in **Luke 21**? First of all, Jesus was foretelling **the destruction of the Temple by the Romans**, in A.D. 70. We find this prophecy in **verses 20-24**. Jesus said that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies, and that the Jewish people would fall by the sword, and be led away captive, and scattered among the nations, ***"until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."*** Now, what, exactly, are ***"the times of the Gentiles"***? It is the period of history in which we are still living! We know when this period *began*; but we don't know when it will *end*, because it will end when Christ returns to earth (and we don't know when that will be). The ***"times of the Gentiles"***

began in **605 B.C.**, when the Babylonians removed the king of Judah from the throne, took the Jews away into captivity. Ever since then, Israel has never had full control of their own land. They have always been under the domination of one Gentile kingdom or another—beginning with the Babylonians, then Persia, then Greece, then Rome, then the Byzantines, then the Muslim Caliphates, then the Crusaders, then the Ottomans, then the English, and then the United Nations. To this day, Israel still does not truly have control of their own land (even though they have *returned* to the land, as God said they would do in the last days). They are constantly being pressured to give up pieces of their land in exchange for “peace.” The Temple Mount itself is still not under their control. As for the Temple itself, there is still an outer piece of the Temple plaza remaining (the “Western Wall”); but the *Temple proper* does not have one stone left standing on another—just as Jesus said would happen.

Now, what is the other event that Jesus is talking about here? **The Tribulation period.** The destruction of the Temple happened nearly 2,000 years ago; but the Tribulation still has not happened. The Tribulation is a seven-year period when God will pour out His judgments upon the whole world; and the horrible things that will happen during those seven years will be the “signs” of Christ’s coming, and of the end of the world. (By the way, the word “world” literally means “age”). The disciples had asked Jesus what will be the sign of His coming, and of the end of this present age; and this was Jesus’ answer. *All* these things—the global wars, devastating earthquakes, intense persecution of believers, unparalleled spiritual deception, fearful signs in the heavens, and sea waves roaring—will happen in the *last seven years* before Christ returns to earth. Believers who will be living at that time will be able to see all these things, and know that Jesus’ return to earth is nearly “at the door.”

Now, perhaps you’re wondering why I keep talking about “seven years,” since there is no mention of “seven years” here in **Matthew 24**, nor in **Luke 21**. In a few moments, I will answer this question from Scripture. First, though, there is something you need to understand. You see, there is an extremely important event that will happen *seven years before* Christ’s return to earth; and Jesus did not mention this event when He was speaking to the disciples on the Mount of Olives. In fact, Christ didn’t reveal this event until 20 years after He had returned to Heaven; and the person to whom He revealed it was **the Apostle Paul**. We call this event “**the catching up,**” or “**the Rapture.**”

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:10.**

My friends, the Rapture is an imminent event—meaning that it could happen at any moment. There are no “signs” that must be fulfilled before the Rapture can happen.

We know that the Rapture will happen seven years before Christ returns to earth to set up His Kingdom; but since we don't know when Christ will return to earth, we don't know when the Rapture will happen, either. What we do know is that it will be a glorious day—for those who are saved! In **1 Corinthians 15**, Paul says that it will come ***“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”*** On the day of the Rapture, all who have died in Christ since the beginning of this church age will rise from their graves with immortal, glorified bodies, to meet Christ in the air. Then, just after the dead in Christ are raised, all believers who are still living will instantly receive their glorified bodies, as well, and will be caught up in the air to meet the Lord. Christ will then take us to the wonderful home that He has prepared for us. Christ hinted at this event in **John 14** when He said, ***“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”***

My friends, the Rapture is a blessing that God has reserved for every believer living in this church age. As we just read in **1 Thessalonians 5**, we who are saved in this church age are not ***“appointed...to wrath.”*** In other words, we will not go through the judgments that God will pour out on this world during the Tribulation, because we will be caught up to meet Him in the air *just before* the seven years of judgment begins. Now, again, we don't know when the Rapture will happen. Though we certainly may look at events that are unfolding in our world (such as Israel's regathering to the land, or the steady march toward a one-world government), and surmise that the time may be getting close, we still don't know when the Rapture will happen. That's why our excitement about Christ's appearing shouldn't be based upon the latest news headlines; rather, our expectation should be based upon the simple fact that *Christ promised* to receive us to Himself one day. One day, the trumpet *will* sound, and Christ will give us new, resurrected, glorified bodies, and will take us home to Heaven!

What is the practical value of living in expectation of Jesus' return? Plenty! Christians who think about Christ's appearing are motivated to live holy lives until He returns. Christian, you don't want to be caught lying, gossiping, committing fornication, watching something filthy, or wallowing in the things of the world, when Jesus appears in the clouds, and catches you up to meet Him. The Apostle John said, ***“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”*** Christian, keep your heart pure. The Lord is coming soon!

## II. The devastation of the Tribulation (vv. 4-8)

**(Read verses 4-14 again.)** What was going through the disciples' minds as Jesus was telling them these things? What order of future events did they see in their minds? It was probably something like this. First, they probably figured that Jesus would go away from them for a short time. Then, shortly after He had gone away, the Temple would be destroyed, and the world would be thrown into a brief time of chaos. But then, Christ would return to set up His Kingdom. At the time, this is probably how the disciples saw it: but little did they know that there would be *many centuries* between the destruction of the Temple, and Christ's return!

Now, we don't have time, this morning, to cover every verse down to **verse 14**. However, I have just read **verses 4-14**, because I want you to see the whole picture. What we are reading here (from **verse 7 and forward**, in particular) is a description of what will happen in the *first half* of the seven-year Tribulation period. Now, there certainly are truths in these verses that can apply to us today. In this church age, believers shouldn't be surprised when they are betrayed by loved ones, or arrested and imprisoned, or even killed. As the time of Christ's return draws nearer, we may also expect there to be a steady increase of earthquakes, famines, and wars. We may also expect an increase of false prophets and imposters claiming to be Christ. For nearly 2,000 years, there have been many false "messiahs"—such as a man named **Simon bar Kochba**, who claimed to be the Messiah, and had a large following, until he was slaughtered by the Romans in A.D. 135. In recent times, we have seen many false christs, as well—such as a Russian man named "**Vissarion**," who, for nearly three decades, claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus Christ (until he was arrested by Russian authorities in 2020). Jesus let the disciples know that there *will* be plenty of false christs, as well as many "**wars and rumours of wars**" throughout this present age, until He returns. Jesus assures us that we needn't be terrified by wars and rumours of wars, because the mere presence of wars and rumours of wars doesn't necessarily mean that the end is here yet. When the time of Christ's return is truly at the door, there will be deception and devastation such as has never been seen before in history—and on a *global scale*. Let's read **verse 7** again. **(Read Matthew 24:7.)**

The verse that we have just read marks the beginning of Christ's description of the Tribulation period. Immediately after the Rapture, wars and natural disasters on an unprecedented scale will pop up *everywhere*. These are just some of the things that will arise at the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation, which was foretold by Daniel. Let's take a look at that prophecy.

**Read Daniel 9:24-27.**

In this passage, Daniel prophesied that there would be 70 “weeks of years” (490 years) from the time that the decree would be made to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, until the beginning of the reign of Messiah. However, Daniel said that just after the **first 69 weeks** (or 483 years) were finished, the **Messiah would be “cut off.”** In other words, the Messiah would be killed! My friends, this is exactly what happened. The “70 weeks of years” began on **14 March, 454 B.C.**, when King Artaxerxes of Persia made the decree to rebuild Jerusalem; and exactly 483 years later, to the day, Christ was crucified on Passover, in **A.D. 30**. The day of Christ’s crucifixion was the day when the first 69 weeks of years ended.

Now, this raises an obvious question: what about the *last* week of years—the 70<sup>th</sup> week? Did the last seven years begin just after Christ’s death, and end in A.D. 37? No! God’s timeclock for Israel “stopped ticking,” so to speak, after the first 69 weeks were completed. Daniel said that sometime *after* Messiah’s murder, an enemy nation would come and destroy the **“city and the sanctuary.”** This happened in A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. And what would happen after *this*? The LORD didn’t give much detail, except to say that **“until the end of the war desolations are determined.”** My friends, *this* is the time in which we are still living—the time of **“desolations.”** For 2,000 years, Israel has been afflicted by Gentile nations all over the world; and this time of desolation will continue through the Tribulation period, and right up to the time of Christ’s return. For now, we are living in an indefinite period of time between the 69<sup>th</sup> and the 70<sup>th</sup> week. It’s as though God has hit a giant “pause” button, until He is ready to deal with Israel again, and bring them back to Himself. However, one day, that 70<sup>th</sup> week of years *will* begin. Immediately after we saints of this church age are raptured out of this world, God will “hit the button” for His dealings with Israel again; and that 70<sup>th</sup> week of years (the seven years of the Tribulation) will begin. During the Tribulation, God will use a series of 21 horrible judgments to open the Jewish people’s eyes to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is their Messiah; and they will finally begin to believe on Him. By the time Christ returns at the end of those seven years, Israel will receive Him!

Now, you’ll notice that in **Daniel 9:27**, the LORD said that in the middle of that 70<sup>th</sup> week, a horrible event called **“the abomination of desolation”** will occur. We will focus on this event in much more detail in the next couple messages. For now, though, what you need to know is that the Tribulation will be split into **two segments of 1,260 days each**, or 3 ½ years—and the **“abomination of desolation”** is the event that will divide it. During the first 3 ½ years, the Temple will be rebuilt under the oversight of an evil world leader called “the Antichrist”; and during this time of seeming “peace” between Israel and her neighbours, God will raise up two special witnesses to testify of Christ in Jerusalem. He will also raise up 144,000 Jewish men to preach the Gospel throughout the world; and multitudes of people will believe on Jesus. But then, in the middle of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will break his treaty with Israel, and will turn against them (this is the **“abomination of desolation”**); and

a time of devastation for Israel will begin. Jewish believers in Jesus, in particular, will have to flee suddenly for their lives, and find a place of refuge in the wilderness during the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation.

**Read Revelation 11:1-12.**

**Read Revelation 12:1-17.**

My friends, the Tribulation will be a time of unimaginable devastation and deception. As Jesus said, many people will come in His name saying, ***“I am Christ.”*** In **Revelation 17**, John describes a vision that God gave him of a woman clothed in purple and scarlet, and riding on a beast with seven heads and ten horns. This harlot woman represents a one-world false religion; and the beast on which she rides represents a one-world government, which will be divided into ten regions. This “woman” will be the creation of the Antichrist and his main man, ***“the false prophet.”*** (This “false prophet” will probably be the ruling pope at that time.) The Antichrist, along with ten world rulers, will realise that in order to maintain their power, they will need to unify all the religions of the world; and the global, apostate religion that they will create will be just the thing to accomplish this. (The disappearance of millions of people in the Rapture will probably be the crisis that they will use to terrify the world into submitting to this world government.) The only people who will *oppose* the Antichrist’s one-world religion, one-world government, and one-world economy, will be those who repent of their sin, and believe on Jesus Christ. However, there will be a high price for opposing the Antichrist: and that price will be death! Those who refuse to take the Antichrist’s mark of 666 in their right hands or foreheads will be arrested and killed. **Revelation 13:16-18** says that the Antichrist will cause ***“all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.”*** Even now, the number 666 is appearing everywhere in pop culture. Satan is preparing people for the future day when they will be forced to take *his* mark, as a sign of their worship of him, and of the Antichrist.

My friends, the Tribulation will be a satanic time—a time of unspeakable terror; and you will *not* want to be here to see it! In addition to the unbridled, bloody cruelty of insane, power-hungry men, the judgments of a righteous and angry God will be crashing down on the world, one after another! After a short time of false peace, the world will erupt into devastating international war; and at the same time, there will be



staggering earthquakes, famines, and pestilences from the hand of God. God described this to the Apostle John in **Revelation 6**.

**Read Revelation 6:1-17.**

Folks, it is hard to us to fathom one quarter of the world's population dying within a very short time. Yet, as horrifying as these first six seal judgments will be, they will merely be the "warm-up" exercises. (For example, during the **sixth trumpet judgment**, another **one-third** of the world's population will be killed by an army of 200,000,000 demonic creatures, which will be released from the pit of hell.) Jesus said that the famine, world war, pestilence, and global earthquakes in the early days of the Tribulation will merely be **"the beginning of sorrows."** The word **"sorrows"** is translated from the Greek word *odínon*, which literally means "birth pangs." You moms can testify that those early contractions are absolutely nothing compared to the *real* contractions, as the time of birth is drawing very near. So it will be with the Tribulation. It will be a time of unspeakable terror and devastation. Things will get worse, and worse, and worse. Even now, in the relatively peaceful times in which we live, many people's hearts are already failing with fear because of things that are happening in our world. However, those who are saved needn't be terrified by these things. To those who know Him Jesus says, **"Look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."**

**Conclusion:** Folks, this has not been an easy message to preach. However, we *need* to hear these things! The Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ aren't just doctrines to study: they are real future events, which will profoundly impact every soul on the face of the earth. (And they may begin to unfold *today*.) If you have never repented of your sins and received Christ as your Saviour, then the fact that Jesus is coming back should motivate you to receive His gift of salvation while you can! If you continue to put off the matter of salvation, there may come a morning when you will wake up to find that millions of people all over the world (including myself, and most of us in this room) have literally vanished from the face of the earth, and that the world has been plunged into chaos. Undoubtedly, the world's governments will try to explain away this terrifying event by saying that there was an "alien invasion," or some other cockamamy story. But whatever their cover story may be, you *don't* want to stick around to find out what it is! Repent of your sin and trust in Christ today, so that you will be caught up to meet the Lord when He appears! If you are saved already, now is the time to serve the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind. Time is running out, and the King is coming back. Work, for the night is coming!