

## LOOK FOR THE KINGDOM

- A. Introduction: The return of Jesus to this earth is not far off. Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 all record a lengthy answer Jesus gave when His disciples asked Him what signs would indicate His return is near.
1. Jesus began by listing some signs of the nearness of His return. Matt 24:4-8--Religious deception, wars, rumors of wars, ethnic (nation) fighting, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, etc.
    - a. We've had wars, famines, earthquakes, ethnic fighting since Adam sinned and the curse of corruption and death entered the earth and the human race. But all of this will intensify as the end of the age approaches. We will see increasingly challenging times on this earth. Jesus said so.
      1. Jesus referred to these first signs He listed as the beginning of sorrows or birth pangs. The Greek word translated sorrows is ODIN which means travail and pain, especially those of childbirth: v8--With all these things the birth-pangs of the new age begin (NEB).
      2. In childbirth the pains start out light, grow more intense, frequent and closer together as the birth approaches. The joy of what is ahead sustains the woman during the pain.
    - b. This will all happen, not because God wants people to suffer nor due to lack of faith on our part. It's simply the nature of the times we are in (more on that in other lessons). But God has given us His Word to help us understand what's going on as well as how to deal with these challenges.
      1. Troublesome, even fearsome things will take place. Some people will be so afraid that their hearts will fail them. But Jesus tells His followers to look up or be elated in joyous expectation (Luke 21:28). It's not what you see. It's how you see it.
      2. We're discussing this subject to help us know how to look at what is happening around us so we can deal with fear. We also want to provide a scriptural context by which we can judge information we hear about the Second Coming to help us guard against deception.
  2. We must never lose sight of what the Second Coming is all about: the return of the Rightful King to establish His kingdom on earth as He comes to live with His redeemed family forever. Rev 21,22
    - a. God has been talking about the end since the beginning because He's working out a plan. His plan is to have a family with whom He can dwell forever. That's why He created mankind (to become His sons and daughters) and earth (to be His family's home). Eph 1:4,5; Isa 45:18
    - b. When Adam disobeyed God and took the entire race in him into sin, corruption and death God's plan seemed thwarted. But God immediately began to unveil His plan of redemption, His plan to deliver men from this condition and still have His family on earth. Gen 3:15; Rev 13:8
      1. Jesus came to earth the first time to pay for men's sins at the Cross and open the way for men and women to become sons and daughters of God through new birth. John 1:12; I John 5:1
      2. He'll come again to deal with all who throughout human history have refused God's offer of salvation through His Cross and to cleanse the earth of all sin, corruption and death, making it a fit forever home for God and His family. Rev 11:18
    - c. People have a tendency to get caught up in pieces of the puzzle (is the rapture pre, mid or post trib; who is the Antichrist; what is the mark of the Beast) without looking at the picture on the front of the puzzle box. Without knowledge of the big picture it's easy to misunderstand the pieces as well as put them in the wrong place. That's why we're emphasizing the overall plan of God.
- B. When God made His promise of the coming Redeemer He instructed men to keep a record as He gradually revealed increasing aspects of His plan of redemption. That record is found in the Bible which tells the story of God's desire for a family and the lengths to which He has gone to obtain that family through Jesus.
1. Almost two thousand years before Jesus came to earth (1921, B.C.) God set apart the people group through whom the Redeemer would come, the descendants of Abraham, zeroing in on a specific tribe (Judah) and a family within that tribe (David's). Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8,9,16; Gen 49:10; Ps 89:35,36
    - a. When God called Abraham's family (the Jews) He promised Abraham that nothing would stop his descendants from growing into a great nation from which the Redeemer would come.

1. Gen 12:3--If anyone curses you (tries to put a spell on you, hem you in with obstacles or render you powerless to resist) I will do the same to them.
2. As we study their history we see that play out over and over as the family grew, despite enormous obstacles, from Abraham and his wife to 500,000 to 600,000 thousand people by the time the Redeemer was born into this world.
- b. God also charged them with the task of compiling and recording His written record. Rom 3:2
  1. The Old Testament is primarily the history of Israel, the nation eventually established by Abraham's descendants (under Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon).
  2. It is the history of real people who really lived on earth, but much of what happened to them pictured or foreshadowed what the coming Redeemer would be like and the work He would do. I Cor 5:7; Col 2:16,17; Heb 10:1; etc.
- c. All of these records telling of and picturing the coming Redeemer were given to glorify God, the only One who knows the future before it happens, to show His faithfulness to keep His Word, to make it clear that the coming of the Redeemer was not a random act, but rather the culmination of a loving, purposeful plan, as well as to give hope to those living in the years before the completion of the plan. Isa 46:10; Luke 24:27,44,45; Rev 19:10; Rom 15:4; etc.
2. In the fourth generation Abraham's family went to Egypt during a time of famine and remained there for four hundred years, growing into almost a million people. They eventually return to and settled in Canaan, the land God had promised to them.
  - a. Before they entered Canaan God warned them: If you worship anyone but Me you will be removed from the land. But when you return to Me, I'll bring you home. Deut 4:25-30
    1. Israel entered Canaan in 1451 B.C. But Israel's history is one of failure as they repeatedly abandoned God to worship the gods and idols of the people living around them.
    2. In 586 B.C. Israel was overrun by Babylonian Empire. Jerusalem and the Temple were burned to the ground and all but the poorest people removed from their land.
  - b. While they were exiled in Babylon God revealed much about the end of His plan of redemption. He told them through the prophet Daniel that He was going to establish His kingdom on earth and that His people would have a part in it. Dan 2:44,45; Dan 7:24
3. Daniel was also given two remarkable timetables as to when God will establish His kingdom on earth. We aren't going to, but could do entire lessons on each one. Consider these highlights.
  - a. Dan 2--Daniel interpreted a dream given to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in which he saw a metallic statue with a gold head, silver shoulders and arms, brass thighs, and iron legs with feet of clay and iron mixed. A Stone not cut with human hands smashed the statue in its feet and became a mountain that filled the whole earth.
    1. God revealed to Daniel that the statue represented four great empires that would control the region (including Israel) from that point up to the establishment of His kingdom on earth.
    2. History confirms this. The head (Babylon) was conquered by the shoulders and arms (Persia) which was then conquered by the thighs (Greece) which was conquered by the legs (Rome).
  - b. Dan 9:24-27--The angel Gabriel told Daniel that God would deal with Israel for their sin for 490 more years. Then He will establish His everlasting kingdom on earth. Gabriel stated the time period as 70 weeks. In Hebrew, week means a period of 7 days or 7 years depending on context .
    1. In His message Gabriel gave specific historical events (for which we have records of outside the Bible) that would take place in these 490 years making it possible to count them out. The countdown began when a decree was issued to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (March 5, 444 B.C., Neh 2:1-8). From that time to the coming of the Messiah would be 69 weeks (7 weeks plus threescore (3x20) plus two weeks = 69 weeks) or 483 years.
    2. From the time the decree was issued until Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the week He was crucified or cut off (March 10, 33 A.D.) is 483 years to the day.
  - c. The prophet Daniel was also given much information about the final empire and its ruler prior to

the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

1. Dan 7:25; 8:23-25---He'll change the laws. He will be proud, a master of strategy with great power. Through peace he will destroy many. He will try to destroy God's holy people and challenge the Prince of Peace before he is ultimately defeated.
2. Dan 11:36-45--He'll be an arrogant blasphemer whose actions and the reactions of people to him produce warfare in Israel. He'll be successful for a time "till the indignation (wrath) be accomplished; for that which is determined [by God] shall be done" (v36, Amp).
3. Dan 12:1,2--This will be a horrific time of tribulation but God will protect His people and His kingdom will be established. God's last word to Daniel was: You'll have a part in it (v13).
4. After 70 years in captivity Israel went back to the land where Jesus would be born. Micah 5:2
  - a. They were a small remnant under the control of foreign rulers, but they were still intact and Abraham's descendants, the tribe of Judah and the family of David were still recognizable. God had kept the promise He made to Abraham in Gen 12:3. And, they now had a timetable in hand as to when the Redeemer and His kingdom would come.
    - b. Four hundred plus years passed and three different empires ruled over them just as God had said. In 63 B.C. the fourth empire, Rome, took control of Israel. Anticipation was high that the time of the Redeemer, the anointed Prince of Daniel 9:25, was near.
      1. Matt 2:1,2--The Wise Men (Magi) arrived in Jerusalem. They were probably from Persia.
        - A. How did they know to look for and follow this star? They knew from the witness left by Daniel in his days in Persia (both the timetable and the prophecy of Num 24:17) that a Star and Scepter would come out of Jacob (Israel).
          - B. King Herod was not of the family of David and had no right to the throne. He feared that a rightful heir was about to be born and tried to kill the infant (Matt 2:16-18). But God kept the promise He made in Gen 12:3 and the Promised Seed escaped (Matt 2:19-23).
        2. When John the Baptist came preaching, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand", and then Jesus came saying "The Kingdom is here" they had everyone's attention. Matt 3:2,3; 4:17
5. The prophets didn't see that there would be two comings of the Redeemer separated by two thousand years or that His kingdom would take two forms -- first His reign in the hearts of men through the new birth (Luke 17:20,21), then His kingdom on earth. This was a previously unrevealed part of the plan.
  - a. Forty days after Jesus' resurrection He returned to Heaven. Just before He left, His disciples asked if He was at this time going to "reestablish the kingdom and restore it to Israel (Acts 1:6, Amp).
    1. At that point they did not yet realize: It's a lot bigger than getting Rome off your backs. But Jesus will soon give additional revelation about His return to Paul, Peter, and John.
    2. His first message to His followers after His return to Heaven was: I'll be back. That's where our focus needs to be (Acts 1:11). He's coming back to complete the plan of redemption.
  - b. One of the reasons Israel as a nation missed the coming of their Messiah was that He did not come according to their preconceived ideas. They presumed He would be a military leader who would end Rome's rule over them. They didn't recognize the Suffering Servant.
    1. There are historical records of imposters who rose up as so called Messiahs (Acts 5:35-39). Theudas led about 400 astray. They followed him to the Jordan river which he said he could part. Roman troops pursued, captured some and killed others. Theudas' head was cut off and carried to Jerusalem. Judas of Galilee stirred up rebellion among Jews shortly after Jesus' birth. He too was destroyed.
      2. In our day, no one yet knows what every verse about the Second Coming means. It's like reading Isaiah 53 before Jesus was crucified. The rabbis argued for centuries as to who and what it meant. But once the crucifixion occurred, the meaning of the chapter was clear.
      3. That's why we have to be very careful about using one or two verses or parts of verses to support our particular interpretation of end time events. We have to look at the big picture and keep our eyes on Jesus -- the coming King and His Kingdom -- through His written Word.

- c. Daniel's prophecies make it clear that two of the principle players in the events on earth at the time the Redeemer establishes His kingdom will be Israel and the fourth empire (Rome).
1. Yet less than forty years after Jesus returned to Heaven the nation of Israel ceased to exist. They rebelled against Roman authority and in 70 A.D. Jerusalem was crushed, over a million people slaughtered, and the rest removed from the land and scattered throughout the Empire.
  2. In 476 A.D. the Roman Empire came to an end, overrun by invading Germanic tribes.
6. When Jesus returned to Heaven no one knew He would be gone so long. So how do we know the time of Jesus' Coming is near?
- a. The reemergence of Israel as a nation in 1948 was and is the big game changer. No other people group in the history of the world has remained culturally intact once removed from their land as Israel has. This is a huge example of God keeping His Gen 12:3 promise to Abraham.
  - b. What about a revived Roman Empire? Rome divided into two parts (legs), east and west before it ceased to exist as an organized entity. But it will reemerge as a ten (toes) member "something". We don't have enough information to be definitive yet.
    1. I sat in a meeting on Dec 31, 1979 where a respected prophecy teacher (he's a good man) thrilled us with the news that the next day (Jan 1, 1980) the tenth nation was going to join the European Common Market fulfilling Daniel's prophecy.
    2. It was not fulfillment of anything. It ceased to exist long ago and Jesus has not returned. People like to speculate, and that's okay. But recognize it for what it is: an educated guess.
7. That being said, we can observe signs of the times. The Apostle John was given additional information about the final form of the kingdom and its leader in the Book of Revelation. It will be a kingdom with worldwide political, economic and religious power. Rev 13
- a. We now have the technology available for such a system. And the idea that we are global citizens who must work together to solve global problems (climate change, terrorism, etc.) is being build into human consciousness bringing people to the point of being willing to give up national sovereignty for the greater good of the world, setting the stage for the final power.
  - b. America must decrease in order for the power center to shift from us to the lands of the former Roman Empire. We have and will continue to decline. Russia must reemerge. It is a big player in end time events. Suddenly they have stepped into the fighting in the Middle East (Ezek 38,39).
  - c. Matt 24:22--Jesus said if He did not come back and stop the tribulation of these final years on all flesh would die. Only since WW II have we had the ability to destroy all flesh through nuclear weapons. Now we have highly developed chemical and biological weapons. And widespread international travel (possible only in recent times) raises the spread of disease to a pandemic level.
- C. Conclusion: When Jesus told His disciples it would get worse before it gets better (birth pangs) they had all the information in the Book of Daniel (and other prophets). But they were not afraid. Why? They knew they'd make it through whatever was ahead. They knew the kingdom of God is coming (Luke 21:31).