

## Session 7

April 18, 2021

### THE RETURN OF JESUS

Matthew 24:3-8, 29-32, 42-44

In the Bible, angels ask some interesting questions. Two in particular come to mind at this time of year. The first is addressed to the ladies by the garden tomb: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” And then answered in the same breath: “He is not here but is risen!”

Another question is asked forty days later of the disciples, on a hillside outside the city: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?” And again, answered by: “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

The return of Jesus is every bit as certain as His birth, death, and resurrection. Article 10 of *The Baptist Faith and Message* declares, “According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness.” In the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24-25, Jesus gave His disciples some details regarding this event.

**Indication (vv. 3-8).** In the final week of His earthly life (what we call Passion Week or Holy Week), Jesus would frequent the temple in the morning, then retire with His disciples outside the city during the heat of the day. The grove of olive trees provided just the spot. On this day, prompted by the sun gleaming on the temple, and the Lord’s subsequent prophecy of its destruction, a few of His disciples (see Mark 13:3) inquired about the details of His “coming,” and the “culmination of the age” (v. 3). Two questions were on their minds: *when* will it happen? And *what signs* will signal its arrival? Jesus’ response was both dramatic and illusive. How often I wish there was a chapter or two in the Bible that spelled out exactly *what* would happen, *when* it would happen, and in *what order*! It’s important to remember that Bible writers painted the end times portrait with a very wide brush. Depending on one’s interpretation, the events that comprise the “Day of the Lord,” His “Second Coming,” or “the End Times” can cover over a thousand years! In this text, the future of Israel seems to be the focus. But some general principles can be gleaned. First, there will be indications that the end is near. Religious upheaval (the rise of false messiahs, v. 5), political upheaval (wars, military conflicts, vv. 6, 7), and natural disasters (v. 7) will all indicate the end is near. Second, Jesus tells believers to be cautious in both their spiritual discernment (v. 4) and their reaction to the “signs” of the times (v. 6). Third, Jesus points out that these occurrences are necessary (v. 6) and finally, that they signal only the beginning of many events to come (v. 8). Like *birth pangs*, they will increase in both frequency and intensity. For reflection: *Obviously, many of the events described are happening right now (and have been for quite a while). What does that tell us?*

**Manifestation (vv. 29-32).** The Bible predicts seven years of terrible tribulation (described in Rev. 6-18) in which God’s judgment is poured out upon the earth. In verse 29, Jesus explains that He will appear immediately at the end of the that tribulation period (in what we call His *2<sup>nd</sup> Coming*). Just like the angels said, *this same Jesus* will appear physically, tangibly, and in person. The first time He came to earth in great humility, but this time He will arrive with *power* and *great glory* (v. 30). The *people of the earth* will mourn the judgment that is to come (v. 30)

and His *elect* will rejoice in their salvation (v. 31). For reflection: *What do you think Jesus meant by giving them the “lesson of the fig tree” in verse 32?*

**Preparation (vv. 42-44).** Even with all the signs described, the exact hour when these events will begin is unknown. (I personally believe the rapture of the church is first, and that could happen at any time! See 1 Thess. 4:15 ff). While Jesus tells His followers not to *fear* these events, He nonetheless tells them to *be prepared* for them. For reflection: *If believers have nothing to fear with His coming, why are we to be prepared? What kind of preparation might He have in mind?*