

Matthew 24:1-12

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[0 : 00] Before I start anything, I just want to pray. I want to pray for two people specifically. I pray, Lord, that you would bring them peace and at the same time restore their daughter to them for as long as is possible.

And to restore a sister to them for as long as possible. That, Lord, she would not be in discomfort and pain and torment. Father, in her particular case, I pray that you would draw her back to the faith that she seems to have left.

And I do pray that you would be merciful. I don't know what's at the back of this illness, but it has come upon him in an absolute torrent. And he's so debilitated by it.

And from what we can gather, not all that likely to recover. But, Lord, you are the Lord of heaven and earth and you can make the impossible happen. And I pray that in both cases you would do that.

But in any event, we thank you. We thank you that there is an eternal hope for these people. Because they, certainly in cases, hopefully in the case of two, that when they put their hope in you, they have an eternal prospect, an eternal hope.

[1 : 44] And it isn't goodbye. It is merely adieu. And we will see them again. But, Lord, I do pray.

I pray that you would intervene. I pray that you'd show your hand. I pray that you'd give us testimony to speak to the world and say that you did this for our children. And that you would be known as a God of mercy.

That your mercy has extended to these people at this time. And we can testify to the mercy and the loving kindness of the living God. With real examples.

Lord, I do pray that you would intervene. In Jesus' name. Amen. So, we are going to embark on Matthew 24.

Matthew 24. Matthew 24 is quite a contentious passage of scripture. And it's also a passage of scripture that causes a lot of people a lot of confusion.

[2 : 50] And even in this room, as we go through Matthew 24, we are going to find that some people don't agree with my take on it. And that's okay. I think you'll find that you do agree with some central points with which we can all agree.

If you disagree, I would ask of you two things. I would ask, firstly, that you check that you're right. Because it's a confusing scripture. It's only confusion because people misunderstand the scriptures. And therefore, you might be wrong. And if you find that you're not wrong, I pray and hope that you will come and correct me. Because I'm human and I'm fallible.

And what you're going to get is the best I can make of it. And like many people who stand up and speak on this chapter, I believe I'm right. But not with such fervor that I'm beyond correction.

But you need to bring convincing scriptures that tell me I'm wrong. Now, Matthew 24. Before we even read any of it, I want to look at some things.

[3 : 59] Matthew 24 and 25, known usually as the Olivet Discourse, are the places in the Bible where Jesus says the most about the end times, meaning the second coming of Jesus.

And to make sense of it, we need to understand that the church, which is us, has a different pathway and a different ending, according to the Bible, has a different pathway and a different ending from the Jews.

This account that we're going to read comes only two days before his crucifixion. Maybe three, but close. And Jesus has shown during this three-year period that he is absolutely, indubitably the long-awaited Messiah.

He has done it in so many different ways, through his virgin birth, through his genealogy, his messianic miracles, his knowledge of the future, his control of the weather, walking on water,

feeding multiple thousands of people from very, very meagre resources, twice, authoritative teaching, the like of which had never been heard before.

All of these things marked him out as the Messiah. It fulfilled what the Old Testament told humanity to expect, and particularly told the Jews to expect, because they were the ones who were supposed to take the gospel forward.

[5 : 23] And of course, they didn't. And unable to refute him, when we get to this passage, they've already decided to kill him. And this is something that he will submit to on the coming feast of Passover in a couple of days' time.

So it's important to note that he submitted to it. He could have stopped it, but he did it for us. And we join this chapter after we've had a large chunk of the previous chapter devoted to him delivering a heartfelt, and I would say broken-hearted, uncompromising sermon about the state of the Jewish mind and heart.

He's effectively called them sons of Satan when he called them a brood of vipers. He's called them whitewashed tombs and accused them of hypocrisy and corruption. And we join the narrative as he's leaving the temple and he's being followed by his disciples, who seem to be trying to placate him a little bit, because what he's delivered in the immediate past is very strong and very forceful. And so as they come out, they're showing him the buildings and waxing lyrical about them. But I want to first of all undo what is often the confusion.

[6 : 54] And I realise as I do this, I might well get some feedback of various levels of passion. But the important thing here is context.

If we miss the context of this chapter, we kind of miss the point. And we start, this is my view of it, we start applying to the church things that were never designed to be applied to the church. They're designed to be applied to Israel as a nation and the Jewish religious leaders in particular. So at the end of the last chapter, if we just look at this, at the end of chapter 23, he says this, just before he leaves the temple and we launch into this Olivet Discourse, he says, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, this is verse 37 of the previous chapter, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her, how often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were unwilling.

Behold, your house is being left to you desolate. For I say to you from now on, you will not see me until, and the word until I believe is very important, you will not see me until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

One of the few bits of Hebrew I know, Baruch HaBah, Bashem Adonai, because it's so important. But he says to them, you will not see me again until.

[8 : 30] Now, I venture to suggest that that still hasn't happened. The Jews have not yet said to their Messiah, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

They are still very much anti-Jesus. They have rejected the Messiah that came and they're still waiting for him to come the first time. And so he has said at this point of rejection and at the point just before he's to be crucified, basically you've blown it.

The opportunity has gone and you're not going to see me again until you say. Now, of course, these Jews are going to be dead by the time this is said.

I mean, it hasn't yet been said. So it's a future generation of Jews that will say it. So this must have been addressed to Israel, not just to an individual Israelite. But you're not going to see me until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And it's important, this distinction. And I do believe the scriptures is absolutely, scriptures are, not scriptures is, what's happened to my English language? The scriptures are unequivocal about these two differences, this separation between the end for the church and the end for the Jews.

[9 : 47] And in this chapter, as we read through, plus other places which I'll refer to, we're going to learn that the Jews are told to expect wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famine, a dreadful time of tribulation, seven years of the outpouring of God's wrath upon the earth.

Now, first point of disagreement, some would say that's only three and a half years of the outpouring of God's wrath. To be honest, I don't mind that difference because it doesn't separate us about essential things. Opportunities to flee to the mountains in verse 16.

God to provide an opportunity to flee other than on a Sabbath day. In verse 20. The abomination of desolations defiling the temple, which has not even yet been built.

But he says, when you see it, in verse 15. The emergence of the beast, the false prophet, and the Antichrist, which are in Revelation 13 and 16, verse 13. Now, those things are yet to come. Now, the breaking, the establishment of a seven-year covenant with the Jews and the breaking of that covenant after three and a half years, all described in Daniel chapter 9.

[11:00] In other words, the Jews are told, look out for signs. And there'll be these signs and those signs and this sign and the other sign. And you will know it's about to happen because of signs.

And one could extrapolate that and say, and therefore it can't happen until you see those signs. So until somebody strikes up a seven-year covenant with Israel and then breaks that covenant halfway through, you don't really know where you are in the great timescale.

You may remember in, I think it's 1 Chronicles, and I can't remember the chapter, it might be chapter 12. It was said that the sons of Issachar, knew their times, and they were good at interpreting their times.

Now, what we see on the run-up to all of this is we see things that are happening that we can point to and say, there's an indication that we're on this pathway. And we're on the pathway to this, somewhere along which there will be the rapture of the church.

And I'll talk about that separately. But we're on a pathway, and we can point to things. We can point to all of the political alliances in the Middle East that are happening that line up with Ezekiel chapter 38 and the great battle that is yet to take place.

[12:21] We can see the movement of the world economy towards cashlessness. Now, cashlessness is the only way you can dictate and control whether people can buy and sell and trade, which, of course, in Revelation 13, we're told that when the beast takes over, he will control people's buying, selling, and trading, and you won't be able to buy, sell, or trade unless you're wearing his mark.

So all of these are signposts to an event yet to come. And obviously, I could wax on for ages about all of that, and I'm not going to. And the list I've read out to you isn't an exhaustive list.

It's just what's really on the surface of Scripture that shouts out at you that this ending for the Jewish nation involves signs. Look out for this sign.

Look out for that sign. Look out for the next sign. When you come to the church, in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 50 to 58, in fact, you can turn there.

This is probably going to be the longest introduction I've ever done on a sermon. Verses 50 to 58.

So in verse 50, it starts and says this, Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

[13:42] Behold, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep. Now sleep, in New Testament terms, if you're an unbeliever, you die, and if you're a believer, you sleep, because it's a temporary state of affairs.

You will be resurrected to eternal life. So I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will all be changed.

For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. So there are no signs for this.

It's something that's going to happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. In fact, if you look into the Greek a bit, it means in an atom of time. You could be in mid-stride and not finish the stride.

Yeah, it's awe-inspiring, but there are no signs to look for. Now, this doesn't mean that we will escape all the persecution that we are about to read about, because the persecution will be levelled at believers.

[14:57] So prior to the rapture, whenever that is, and we don't all agree on when that is, but whenever it is, we are likely to be persecuted, and we're told to expect that.

And that in the scriptures is described as tribulation, and I believe that tribulation and the tribulation need to be separated. But that's another Bible study.

The point is that this ending for the church doesn't involve a series of signs that we should look out for. But that doesn't negate the fact that we're supposed to be able to judge what's going on in our times.

So although we can see the world going down the pan big time, what we can tell then is the end is getting closer.

What we can't tell is when it's going to come. But we can tell that it'll be a different ending from the Jews. In 1 Thessalonians 4, if you turn there, and this is, it's interesting because the Apostle Paul, you will find in many churches there is a real resistance to teaching end time stuff.

[16:11] And I do believe that we have to teach it because if for no other reason, Paul spent roughly three weeks with the Thessalonian church, just three weeks.

And in those three weeks, he thought it was important to teach them about end time stuff. And if we don't learn about end time stuff, then we don't know about these things that are going to happen in our society that should be signposts for us that the rapture is getting closer.

I'll just clear up one point, maybe for some people, lots of people say, there isn't even a word rapture in the Bible. I'll deal with that in just a second. But in 1 Thessalonians 4 and verse 17, what we read is this.

And we who are alive, and remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we shall always be with the Lord.

So the word caught up in Greek is the word harpazo. And the word harpazo in Latin is rapture or rapturo.

[17:15] So the word rapture comes from a Latin translation, the Vulgate. And in that Latin translation, this being caught up, harpazo, which means snatched, it means gone, it means you didn't get a moment to even think about it, you went.

And you were snatched up by the power of the Lord. It's also a word that's sometimes used of a thief when he snatches your stuff when you're not looking. It's instantaneous and you don't get any warnings and you don't get any signs.

So you can't tell when it's going to happen, but you can tell the season you're in. So returning to the point, the rapture is a completely sign-less event.

When God comes for his church, it's a sign-less event. It could take place between the words of this talk, if the Lord so wished, which would leave me frustrated in heaven because I didn't finish the talk.

I'd get over it. Now right now, we have constant reminders that God coming to rapture his church, to snatch away his church, we have all sorts of reminders.

[18:30] I've already mentioned the move towards cashlessness. That is a reminder that the rapture is getting close. When those words were written, the idea of a cashless society would have been completely, what?

You're mad. We can't have a society without cash. The move towards a one-world church that are going on. Amalgamate the Catholics and the Anglicans and if possible, the Muslims and the Hindus as well, which of course means that Jesus has to take a back seat and...

But these moves are signs that the rapture is closer, tantalisingly close. The move towards a one-world government, the Antichrist when he surfaces will be a world leader of a one-world government.

The worldwide moves towards antisemitism, the political alliances that we've already spoken of that fulfil Ezekiel 38 and 39. And the age where evil is called good and good is called evil, which we'll read about in Isaiah 5 and verse 20.

We're now in an age where things that we used to think were evil are now saying, no, it's not evil, it's good. Pride marches are good. No, they're not.

[19:44] In case anybody listening thinks I meant that. You know, these things are not good. God says they're evil. In fact, Romans 1 says people who play those games are worthy of death.

So, we are going at steam train velocity towards God coming for his church. And of course, the difference is that God doesn't come to earth for his church, he calls his church up to him.

So, this is something that takes place in the air and God snatches his church into the air. As opposed to what we're reading about in Matthew 24, which happens on the earth and Jesus comes to earth at the end of it in his second advent.

This indicates that you cannot be part of both groups. And this is where lots of Christians get confused when they talk about the end of the times, the second coming, as opposed to the rapture of the church.

Sometimes they muddle the two together. They can't work out when it happens. You get pre-millennial, post-millennial, mid-tribulational, amillennial, you name it. You get all these different views of when all this is going to happen.

[20 : 54] Personally, I think the scriptures are fairly clear on it. But I'm not so arrogant as to think that I'm necessarily the only brain that's ever worked it out. So, I'm open to correction.

But just let me run through these differences. Israel, the end for Israel, the second coming of Jesus, comes after signs. The church, the end of the church age, is a sign-less event.

Jesus comes, second advent, to judge sins. When he comes to rapture the church, there is no judgment of sins. He's coming for those whose sins have already been paid for.

The end of Israel comes when Jesus comes to earth. The end of the church comes when he calls the church up. You can't be in both of these groups.

When he comes back second advent to Israel, he comes with his saints. We read, when he comes for the church, he's coming with those he has saved.

[22 : 07] These are people who are already saved, who are being taken away. Second advent, second coming, he's coming to do battle with armies, and we read about the battle of Armageddon and all that.

For the church, he's coming to take his bride. Completely different focus and purpose. At the second advent, all unbelievers are removed to the lake of fire.

When Jesus comes for his church, all believers are removed for reward. They're diametrically opposed to each other, this. When he comes, second advent, it's not about resurrections.

There aren't a load of people being raised from the dead in that time. When he comes for his church, it involves the resurrection of dead saints. So can you see, and this is, again, this is not an exhaustive list, but it makes it clear that you can't be in both groups.

You're either in the church and you look forward to one ending, or you're in Israel and you look forward to another ending. Now my contention is that what we are reading in chapter 4, this is the end of the introduction, what we're reading in chapter 24 is the end for Israel.

[23 : 24] And I know there are some that disagree with me, but I'm happy to have that disagreement. I don't think your or my salvation is compromised by it and we can always discuss it.

So, let's now read Matthew 24. So, Matthew 24, they're just coming out of the temple and says this, Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when his disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to him.

And he said to them, do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another which will not be torn down. So, my impression is this, this is not absolutely clear in scripture, but they've just heard him say, you're not even going to see me until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And he's effectively at this point, he has dismissed Israel, as in, you know, not forever, but for now, he's postponed whatever he was planning to do with Israel.

And he says, you're not going to see me until, now these disciples must have thought, we don't understand this. And so he gets outside, they get outside, Jesus has left the temple, and he's actually heading for the Mount of Olives, which means he's got a journey down a valley, I can't bring the name to mind, but he goes down a valley and up the other side, the valley of Kidron, to the Mount of Olives.

[25 : 01] And it's on that journey that he has this conversation. And the first thing he says to them when they're saying, look at these buildings, aren't they wonderful? And what they are showing him in a sense, is their lucky charm.

These buildings, this temple, shows you that God is with us. And we know God is with us because the temple is here.

And it's, in a way, I would almost go as far as to say they're trying to correct his thinking, which wouldn't be the first time, would it?

And he then says, do you not see all these things? Truly, I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another which will not be torn down. To them, that must have been incomprehensible.

This massive, ornate, said to be the most wonderful building on earth at the time, is going to be not just knocked down, but knocked down so thoroughly that none of the stones will remain together.

[26 : 07] And of course, that prophecy in AD 70 was utterly fulfilled because the gold in the temple had melted and it had run down between all these stones and had kind of acted like mortar and they had to separate the stones to get to the gold.

And so, the Romans picked over that site to get gold and separated all the stones. And so, an absolutely literal fulfillment of this prophecy took place.

And to them, it must have been, I don't know, it's like somebody coming, just removing all the foundations of anything you ever held dear in your life, just gone in an instant.

What Jesus was saying is, you've got this lucky charm, the temple, and it's not even going to be there, in fact, not even the stones are going to be stuck together anymore. And then we read on, as he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, tell us when these things will happen, and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?

And it looks like three questions, but most scholars say it's actually two questions, because there is a, well, I've forgotten the name of the guy who, after whom the Greek construction was named, but, when are these things going to happen?

[27 : 30] That's the first he asks, and then, what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age? Scholars agonise over, were they asking him about the second coming, or were they asking him when he was going to come and duff up the Romans who had Israel under oppression?

I'm not even going to approach that, I have not a clue, I just know what Jesus answered, and he answered as though he was talking about his second coming, and his answers to these questions were, see to it that no one misleads you, for many will come in my name saying, I am the Christ, and will mislead many, you will be hearing of wars and rumours of wars, see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end, for nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes, but all these things are merely the birth pangs, then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name, at that time many will fall away, and will betray one another, and hate one another, many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many, because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be saved, this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come, so easy, eh?

The first thing to note, we're warned about wars, rumors of wars, pestilence, earthquakes, etc, etc, etc, in each case we're warned once, but there's something about which the Lord warns in this passage, and by this passage I mean this and the rest of this chapter, he warns at least four times, which is that there will be false Christs and deceivers, and the presence of false Christs and deceivers, I mean if the Lord takes the trouble to put something in the scripture four times in one passage, we should take note, and we tend to think of this as these figures that arise who are eminent figures and enigmatic figures and they turn up and they drag crowds of thousands after them because they are so wow, there's a wow factor about them, and quite often they bear the name of Christ deceitfully and lead thousands astray, now on the, when you get the notes, on the notes, there is a list of messianic claims, right, and I think it's about 25 different ones that happened between 1900 and now, and so prior to that there was the odd head that popped up and said, oh I'm the messiah, and everybody went, yeah, go away, but latterly we've been deluged with these people who are claiming to be messiah, and their actually the easier ones to deal with, because when they stick their head above the parapet, certainly for we Christians, when someone comes along and says,

I'm actually Jesus, now I was in my previous church, we had a thing going on in a coffee shop, and we were doing various bits of outreach in this coffee shop, and this chap came and sat next to me, and when I talked to him about the Lord, he said, well I am the Lord, and I had this long conversation where, I won't bore you with the details, but I basically said, look, you're not, and took him through one or two things where he couldn't possibly be the Lord because he couldn't do certain things, but we left it there, but those are actually quite easy to deal with, the ones that are hard to deal with and require us to dig into scripture and learn and learn what the Bible says, you know, the Bereans were patted on the back hugely by the apostle Paul because they searched the scriptures to check out that what Paul was saying was the truth, and we desperately need to do that, and you need to do it with anyone, including me and Joe, anybody that gets up here and speaks what seems to be the truth, you need to diligently check it out, because the biggest number of deceitful so-called messiahs are these people who develop huge ministries that are worth millions of pounds, fly around in their own jets, drive posh cars, and they preach an attractive gospel that says effectively you can have whatever you want, name it and claim it, if you pray over it, then you'll get it, and all of that, it's all false stuff, why do

I call them false messiahs? Well, because they all claim to have a special anointing, what does the word messiah mean? It means the anointed one, so people who claim to have this special

anointing, this special revelation, you know, people I heard recently, fairly recently, who were coming and saying, I'm going to give you an impartation, as if they've got something that no one else has got, and they need to impart it to you.

[33 : 10] These are false messiahs, they're coming along saying, I've got what you need, I can give you the Holy Spirit, oh yeah, okay, I can bring the prophetic word to you, always understand that whilst the prophetic word isn't completely dead, the prophets wrote the Bible, and the Bible's finished, someone who comes along and says, I'm a prophet of God, why do I always put on a Yankee accent when I say that, because most of them are American that do it, but when they claim to be a prophet of God, they are lying or they are deluded, one or the other, whichever is the case, they're just as dangerous to you and to me, because someone says, well I believe I'm speaking on behalf of the Lord here when I say whatever, you then have to go back to your Bible and have a look and see whether that's true, because this is the yardstick by which prophets and apostles are judged, the NAR movement as a movement is a false

Messiah movement, it claims this apostolic anointing and it's got nothing of the kind, it flies in the face of scripture again and again and again, so that's the first thing, deceit, deceit is going to be a tidal wave in its way of coming upon the church and we need to be vigilant and we need to protect one another and we will come across brothers and sisters who are drawn away into these things because they have this attraction and they need to be drawn back if they will come back, sometimes it's painful because they won't, so deceit, then he goes on and talks about nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom and this is obviously from the context of the scripture, this describes nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom on the world stage, there are some bible scholars and

I guess I don't have a firm view, a dogmatic view on this one way or the other, but it does seem to ring true that the one occasion in world history when this has been the case, when the whole world has been ranged against each other, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom with the two world wars, and one man that comes to mind who states this is Arnold Fruchtenbaum, who says, there has never been another occasion when all the nations of the world faced each other, and I think it was something like 105 nations involved in the two world wars, and I think the death toll was something like 93 million people, so it's, there's never been anything like that before, so Arnold would say this is a marker for us to know that we are in the last of the last days, because nation has been ranged against nation and kingdom against kingdom on the world stage, whether or not he's right, and there are some who would say, no, no, no, he just, that's, it's too tenuous, but whether or not he is right,

I think a statistic upon which we can rely is something like since, I'm not sure about these dates if anybody's listening online, but the late 1800s right through to the present day, there has never been a time when there hasn't been war going on on the earth, earth, and right now, if you were to count up the various wars, there would be something like 82 different wars going on on earth right now. Now, we're hearing wars and rumours of wars, so whether you accept or reject the World War I and II thing, it's happening and we can see it happening, and we should be taking note.

[37 : 20] Another thing about which we should take note, battles that we get involved in, whether they mean personal battles or wars, they are not battles of flesh and blood.

Now, flesh and blood is what suffers, people get killed, but according to Ephesians 6, the battles we fight are not battles of flesh and blood, but they are spiritual battles against the principalities and powers and the rulers in the heavenly places.

In other words, they are satanically driven. So the answer to a lot of these battles, whilst you do have to stand up and pick up your gun and go and defend yourself, the answer to these battles is prayer, because that's the answer to a spiritual battle.

So, wars. Then, it goes on to associate this, if we go back to Matthew 24 and verse 8, but all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs, he's saying these are not, these things are not the end.

What we're looking at are signposts to the end, but they're not yet the end. And those of you in the room, which is presumably only the ladies, although this day and age you do wonder, who have had babies, birth pangs, and lots of the descriptors about end time stuff is either to do with obstetrics or seismology.

[38 : 58] It's either earthquakes or child birth. And in both cases you get little warning signs, you know, your brax and hips contractions or you get little tremors before the big one or whatever.

And so there is a timeline where the pain grows or the expectation grows. And so what the Lord is saying here is these are just the beginning of the birth pangs and the analogy here is one of obstetrics.

It's like a woman giving birth and you're having the first pangs. And I don't know about you, but I look at some of it and I think if these are the first pangs, when we get to the end it's going to be awful. But those first twinges are what we're getting.

It's a good job men don't have to do that. But that's not part of the study. Now these birth pangs are also associated with earthquakes and famines.

The end of verse 7, there will be famines and earthquakes and if you read Luke's account, there are also plagues or pestilences. So earthquakes, famines and pestilences.

[40 : 14] Now associated with the two world wars, there were massive epidemics of flu and other illnesses. But suddenly what you've got because of the two world wars is you've got massive international travel and people are travelling to places that have got bugs that they've never been exposed to before.

And so you get people dying from things that the local population are pretty much immune to. And so there was a massive flu epidemic in 1918.

The Spanish flu epidemic claimed between 50 and 100 million lives. In 56 to 58, Asian flu claimed 68,000 lives. The 1968-69 flu pandemic claimed approximately a million lives.

And then there was a cholera pandemic in the early 1900s, sort of around about 1920. It was called the sixth cholera pandemic.

That claimed 800,000 lives. And of course that list again is not an exhaustive list. There was a massive onset of plagues and pestilences.

[41 : 26] And it's been going on ever since. And of course now we've turned yet a new corner because we're now making our own pandemics. Create them in the lab and release them. And then pretend it was all an accident.

Plagues, pandemic, earthquakes, since 1970 I think. No, it was earlier than that.

It was early in the 1900s. They realised that the number of earthquakes was increasing dramatically. And between 1900 and 1975, that period of time, there were more earthquakes that killed more than 10,000 people than in previous recorded history.

century. There was a sudden bunching of earthquakes into the 20th century. And we've got better at keeping people alive through earthquakes and not as many people get killed by them these days. But they're still happening. And all of these are birth pangs. They tell us that the second coming is underway. And by extension, the rapture of the church is also underway.

[42 : 38] When you get the notes, there will be two slides of people who claim to be Messiah. Just for your interest, as I say, there's about 20 of them.

And that, again, is not an exhaustive list. There's also a graph that tells you about world famine. World famine increased dramatically at the beginning of the First World War.

It climbed up to a peak around about 1930. It dropped a bit and then climbed again at the end of the Second World War. And then it dropped away to its current levels.

But this massive increase in famines, where people were just dying of starvation everywhere, and I don't know that it's gone away. I know that it doesn't get on the news.

I mean, when I was younger, it was all about Biafra, and the starving children of Biafra were very much in the news. I don't see too much on the news these days.

[43 : 35] It's not good optics to show starving people. So why are we not showing that? Well, it might be to do with people becoming cold-hearted. We'll return to cold-heartedness in a moment.

So we're making our own plagues, and we've talked about the deceivers, because the Lord returns to deceit, doesn't he?

He says, then they will deliver you to, this is verse nine, they will deliver you to tribulation and will kill you and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. At that time, many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

So you've got hatred creeping in, and people who would normally love one another start to hate one another. And this is first of all associated with cold-heartedness. Cold-heartedness speaks of indifference, but hatred is active.

So somewhere along the line, the people who are falling away, first their heart grows cold, and then they grow hatred for their brothers and sisters. And we have massive groups that deceive many,

and you wonder what their eventual destiny is.

[44 : 55] We've got people like the Jehovah's Witnesses who are a false profit organisation. Now, the people that come to you on the street and try to persuade you, they're very, very sincere.

They have been misled, but their leadership has founded a massive financially huge organisation which again and again has shown itself to be a false profit, as indeed have the Mormons.

The NAR group are propagating satanic nonsense and captivating many. We've got the likes of Benny Hint, Todd Bentley, Kenneth Copeland and so on. All of these claiming to have a special anointing deceiving many and bringing about this falling away.

I don't think the church is immune to this concept of falling away. It's one of the reasons I chase people up when they stop coming to church. It's because I don't want people to fall away. It's so easy.

Well, you know, the kids have got a birthday party and I've got a match to go to. Putting God at the bottom of the list again and again and again does not serve you well because your heart can grow cold and at some point you start to hate the people who are trying to get you to come to church.

[46 : 09] church. So I realized I'm out of time. I'm going to deal with the last two verses next time.

The verses that say the one who endures to the end will be saved and the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations and then the end will come.

I can't unpack that in a matter of a minute or two. So I'm going to start next week with that. But I think the takeaway for us is the Berean Jews were praised for their diligence in the scriptures which brought them to true belief.

They cut through all the stuff and all the other Jews around were fickle and they were persecuting the disciples that had been sent to them but the Berean Jews searched the scriptures and went aha this is true and so they put their weight behind it and they got praised for it.

We are undoubtedly in the beginning of birth pains and what we've read is they will deliver you.

Now who is you?

[47 : 17] I believe this with all my heart they will deliver you Jews to great tribulation. The Jews are being spoken to in a context that only applies to Jews and what we'll see next week is that all the language used is about being Jewish praying that you won't be fleeing on the Sabbath day to a Gentile that doesn't matter.

More of that next week. We are witnessing a spread of cold heartedness and even hatred. We're fortunate in this nation that people don't take us out and chop our heads off if we preach the gospel but there are many nations where that is not the case.

And I'm going to leave it there. Our takeaway from this is to be diligent in our study of the scriptures so that we're not taken in by the deceivers. Father I thank you for this word and I thank you that whatever else we might disagree about we can agree that you want to protect your children from being deceived and that you've given us this word which is very comprehensive and which contains everything we need for life and godliness.

And we thank you that you have provided well for us and I pray Lord that you will somehow impress upon our hearts to be diligent in our study. In Jesus name.

Amen.