

**The Doomsday Coronavirus?**  
*Wednesday Online Bible Study*  
3/25/20

**Introduction:**

- A CNN article by John Blake was published on Monday titled, “Coronavirus is bringing a plague of dangerous doomsday predictions.”
- One Christian quoted in the article said concerning recent events such as COVID-19 and swarms of locusts in Africa, “Jesus said these things will happen” and that the Earth is undergoing “birthing pains before Jesus’ second coming.” He continued, “I absolutely think it could be a direct sign of something God said would happen, or even a precursor for things to come.”
- So is the Coronavirus, the earthquakes this week in Utah, Nevada, and California, the locusts in Africa—are they signs of the end of the world coming soon? I don’t think so.

**The Olivet Discourse**

- The most popular biblical citation for the end of the world coming is from the Olivet Discourse. This is a teaching that Jesus gave while on the Mt. of Olives to his disciples, thus, the Olivet Discourse. This can be read in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.
- For example, in Mark 13:7-8 it states, “And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”
- So when there are wars and earthquakes and famines, Christians wonder, are these the birth pains? Are these signs of the monumental, cataclysmic events to come when Jesus returns?
- My short answer is once again, I don’t think so. Many of my brothers and sisters in the Christian faith believe the Olivet Discourse is a prophecy by Jesus about future events yet to come at the end of the world. They may be right. But I respectfully disagree.
- For a full explanation of the Olivet Discourse, I encourage you to go to our church website and listen to the five sermons from Mark 13.
- In these sermons I present a view that the majority of Mark 13 was fulfilled in the first century in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Therefore the “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...earthquakes, famines” were fulfilled in the first century, not future events before the return of Jesus.
- Here is how I believe we should outline Mark 13:
  - In verses 1-2, Jesus predicts that the temple will be destroyed.
  - In verses 3-4, Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask Jesus when the temple will be destroyed and what will be the signs of it happening soon.
  - Then in verses 5-29, Jesus answers their question.
  - And then in verse 30, he says, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” So everything before verse 30 were events that took place in that first-century generation.
    - “This generation.” - The generation of the disciples that Jesus is speaking to and answering their question about the destruction of the temple.

- “This generation” is used throughout the Gospels to refer to the generation in the first century, not some future generation.
  - In Matthew 23:36, after Jesus gives many Woes to the Jewish leaders he says, “Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” The woes will come upon the generation in the first century. So then Jesus mourns over the coming destruction of Jerusalem when he says in verse 37, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”
  - Luke 17:25 – “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”
- The Olivet Discourse is Jesus explaining in more specific terms what he already promised in the parable of the Wicked Tenants so that the Christians will flee Jerusalem before it is destroyed. You can read the parable of the Wicked Tenants in Luke 20.
  - After the wicked tenants kill even the landlord’s Son—who is obviously corresponding to Jesus, verse 16 says that the Landlord “will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”
  - Jesus explains to his Jewish audience that the Father (the Landlord) had sent the Son (the landlord’s son) and yet the tenants (Israel) will kill him. But then the Landlord (God) will destroy the tenants (Israel).
  - So it is no surprise that a chapter later Jesus further tells the disciples that the temple will be destroyed and gives details on how this will come about.
- Here are a few interesting thoughts from this lengthy text:
  - Concerning the rumors of wars, Josephus, a first-century historian wrote about the fears of war in 40 AD when the Emperor Caligula attempted to erect a statue of himself in the temple of Jerusalem.
  - Concerning earthquakes, there was an earthquake at the crucifixion of Jesus and then the temple’s curtain tore in two—no doubt a foreshadowing of the coming destruction of the temple and no need for the temple now that Jesus is our Great High Priest and our atoning lamb once and for all. But Josephus also records that there was a great earthquake in 67 AD during the Great Jewish Revolt. The very day of this earthquake, the high priest of the temple was slaughtered by the hands of Jewish zealots. Thousands were killed in the city and the outer courts of the temple flowed with blood. So in the midst of the rebellion against Rome, the Jews were infighting. And in the midst of this deterioration of the temple grounds, there was an earthquake.
  - Concerning famine, the book of Acts records a great famine in Acts 11 in the days of the emperor Claudius.
  - In Mark 13:20 it says “And if the Lord had not cut short the days...” The Roman General Vespasian invaded Israel and was headed towards Jerusalem. But in 68 AD, Emperor Nero committed suicide but he had no children to succeed him. This caused a temporary upheaval of power in the Roman Empire. Three different men were assassinated as they claimed the throne. Eventually the Roman Senate elected Vespasian to be the new emperor. So he withdrew his siege of Jerusalem to return to Rome. Then he sent his son Titus to finish the

siege and under Titus Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. In this window between Vespasian leaving and Titus returning, the Christians fled Jerusalem, so that when Titus came back, there were virtually no Christians left in the city to be killed. The days of the tribulation were shortened by this gap in the siege.

- The abomination of desolation mentioned in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14 is interpreted for us in Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse. He says in Luke 21:20, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near." Jerusalem will be destroyed! And it was in 70 AD by the Romans. Thus verse 24 tells us that "Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles..."
- Matthew 24:30 tells us "...and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn..." The word translated "earth" can be translated either earth or land. Tribes is often a reference to the tribes of Israel. Since Luke already told us that it is Jerusalem that will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, once again, it makes sense that Matthew records Jesus telling us that all of the tribes of the land of Israel will mourn. Why? Because the Romans have destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.
- And the final amazing historical fact that can't be just coincidence: In Jeremiah 52:12, we are told that the first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians on the tenth day of the fifth month (Av), which happened in 587 BC. Josephus tells us that the second temple was destroyed on the tenth day of the fifth month (Av) by Titus! This was in early August, 70 AD. Could this be God showing that the destruction of the Temple was God's will, that he had guided its destruction to the exact same day as its previous destruction 657 years before? I believe God was communicating very clearly to Israel that Jesus is the Messiah, that the temple has been destroyed because of their rejection of Jesus, who is the Lamb who once and for all has taken away the sins of the world. As Hebrews 10:4 says, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." And as Hebrews 10:10 says, "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."
- So I encourage you to go listen to those sermons. I am happy to share with you all of the sermon notes from Mark 13. In fact, I will post them on our church website. I respect those evangelical Christians that disagree with my interpretations. But I would kindly direct us towards understanding that the current COVID-19 epidemic is not a fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse warnings, because those were warnings to Christians to flee Jerusalem when God would send the Romans to destroy it in 70 AD. But when Jesus returns there will be no fleeing. We all will have to answer to Jesus. For the Christian, it's a welcome party, welcoming our King. 2 Thessalonians 1:10 says that we will marvel at his coming. For the unbeliever, it is a day of terror in which 2 Thessalonians 1:8 says the Lord Jesus will be "inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

### **Conclusion:**

- But what about the locusts! Doesn't Revelation 9 talk about locusts? Maybe that can be another devotional video. But in short, I believe the Revelation 9 locusts are demons that are released to bring harm to Israel during the Roman siege in the first century. They are pictured not as harming vegetation but tormenting people of the land.

- Be careful of seeing disasters in our world and immediately applying them to the Bible without studying what the Bible is saying in the particular passages. Remember that Christians have made these errors before. This is not the first time we have seen a virus pandemic. This is not the first time we have seen locusts or earthquakes. You may say “But they are becoming more frequent than ever before.” I would say, how do you know that? We have only had global communication and testing of these phenomenon for one hundred years or so.
- The New Testament’s emphasis on the return of Christ is that we will not know when it will happen. 2 Peter 3:10 – “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” The day of the Lord will be like a thief; we don’t know when he will come.
- So let’s not get caught up in looking for signs of his coming. Let’s get more caught up in preaching the Gospel! If I am wrong and these are signs that he is coming soon—all the more reason for us to be more fervent in preaching the Gospel! So let’s do that! He is coming again to set up his kingdom on this earth forever!
- That day is surely coming! So let us be caught being busy about kingdom business when the master returns home. Let us help people understand during this virus epidemic that there is a kingdom coming with no sickness for those who trust in Jesus. Let us declare good news of God’s forgiveness and everlasting life to the person who has been reminded in this time that death is certain and coming for us all.
- We are supposed to be the warning. John the Baptist warned the people to repent before the first coming of Jesus. We must warn people to repent and turn to Jesus to enjoy him forever before the second coming of Jesus.
- I will rejoice if people see this COVID-19 epidemic as warning of the return of Jesus and turn to Jesus by repentance and faith. But I would rather see this epidemic as one more confirmation of what Scripture is very clear on: we live in a fallen world, and it will only be redeemed by Jesus, both our souls and bodies, and the creation.