

The Beginning of Birth Pains, Part 2

Luke 21:8

March 17, 2024

You can turn in your Bibles to Luke 21, Jesus' prophecy about the End Times and about his return to earth; the Second Coming. This prophecy comes in response, as we've seen, to a question from Jesus' disciples. Jesus had predicted the divine judgment that would come upon the city of Jerusalem and its temple, Luke 21:5 and 6, which results in questions that his disciples asked, in verse 7, about the end. And so, from verses 8 to 36, as Jesus the Messiah answers their questions about the end, about the signs of the times, he is speaking here from his prophetic office.

He's speaking about the immediate future of these disciples, and he's also speaking about the far future of the Jewish nation and about the restoration and redemption of believing Israel. And notice, we've pointed this out, but I'm going to point it out again, here, that Jesus starts and ends his prophecy by admonishing his disciples to stay awake, and to stay alert, and

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to be watchful. Notice at the end of the prophecy in verse 36, Jesus says, but keep alert.

"Keep on the alert at all times, praying earnestly that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place." And strength, praying earnestly, you may have strength, "to stand before the Son of Man." Speaking prophetically, the second person plural address to these disciples, he's treating them as believing representatives of a future believing Israel. Obviously, he uses the second person plural address to speak to them, as those who will, some of them living through the destruction of Jerusalem, which he speaks about in verses 20 and 24.

So some things, in this prophecy, pertain to them in particular, but other things like standing before the Son of Man, that will happen in the far future. No matter which generation though, believers are to be characterized by watchfulness. So Jesus ends his prophecy in that way, and it's the same way that he started it with this call to watchfulness. Take a look at verses 8 through 11, "He said, 'See to it that

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you are not deceived, for many will come in my name saying, "I am he!" and, "The time is at hand!" 'Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified, for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately.' And he continued saying to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.'"

And he stops himself and says, "but before all these things." And he has particular things to say to these disciples. But the word is stay watchful. See to it you're not deceived. Beware. The time of which Jesus speaks was known to Israel. It's his disciples, the hearers of this prophecy, the initial hearers, they understand what he's talking about. He's Speaking of a time known to Israel, as in the words of Jeremiah the prophet, in Jeremiah 30 verse 7. It's the time of Jacob's trouble; the time of Jacob's distress.

A time of distress and trouble for the nation, and it's a time of distress and trouble that, from which and out of which, God

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will save the nation, Israel. He will not save them, apart from their repentance and their belief, that he will save them in their faith. In fact, just listen to these words. You can turn there if you want to, but Jeremiah 30 starting in verse 4, "These are the words which Yahweh spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah." Notice the joining together of the of Judah and Israel that were a divided nation, both of them exiled at different times. And now he speaks concerning this united Israel and Judah.

"For thus says Yahweh, 'We have heard a sound of trembling, of dread, and there is no peace. 'Ask now, and see If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man *with* his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? *Why* have all faces turned pale? Alas, for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is a time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it.'" 'And it will be in that day,' declares Yahweh of hosts, '*that* I will break his yoke from off your neck, and I will tear off your bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves. But they shall be a slave to Yahweh their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.'"

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So here's David, David's greater son, Jesus the Christ. He's unpacking this time in his prophecy. He's unpacking this prophecy of Jeremiah. He's predicting how it's going to unfold. And there's gonna be more to say in the New Testament. There's gonna be more to say in the Book of Revelation. But right now, in the Olivet Discourse, that is some of what he's unpacking. We commonly refer to this time in verses 8 through 11, and also in verses 25 to 28, but we've heard of this as the great tribulation.

The disciples, in all Israel, would know this as the time of Jacob's trouble. It starts in verses 8 to 11 and then finishes up in 25 to 28 and culminates in the coming of the Son of Man. Now the timing about all this is a point of great debate, which I don't intend to obscure or pass over, at all. The nature of this debate, timing, we need to understand. Timing was at the very heart of the disciples' questions too. They want to know when is this gonna to happen, What'll be the signs? When will these things be, verse 7? What will be the sign, when these things are about to take place? They're interested in the timing as well; just as we are.

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And Jesus said, the time will begin, verses 8 through 11, with what we find in Matthew and Mark are called the beginning of birth pains. It's the first half of the great tribulation. This is in the first of the pains that we see. The first of the birth pains is a proliferation of many false messiahs. Verse 8, "See to it that you are not deceived, for many will come in my name saying, 'I am he!' and 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them."

So we started last time into this verse with some observation questions who, what, when, where, why, and how. When we got to two of those last time, we're going to, by God's grace, finish up the rest today. Number one, who is Jesus warning and about whom is he warning them? Jesus. That's our first point, which I mentioned last time. The Who, Jesus is warning his disciples. The twelve in particular are here, but there may be other disciples as well; but they are the representatives of believing and repentant Israel. They are the ones who will one day say, or the representation of the ones who will one day say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

And the warning for them, as representatives of these future believers, and warning to them, in particular, see to it that you are not deceived. Then the end of the verse, do not go after these false messiahs. Don't go after the many who will proliferate at the end and try to deceive. About whom is Jesus warning them. Notice it's not about false prophets. Notice that it's not about false teachers. The warning is about false messiahs, and that is a more specific and extremely audacious claim for any human being to make.

Some find it helpful to their view of eschatology to count any false prophet or any false religious leader as a messiah. But Jesus has not left that up to us to define how we want to. He actually uses the language of Messiahship; not false prophecy, not false leader, false teacher, but Messiah. So we'll see that, in the second point, when we ask the question, the what question; What are the many doing?

What are they doing? Number two: They will be making messianic claims. I am he. It means, according to Matthew 24:5, it means, I am the Christ. It is a claim that is then connected by Luke

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with a divine timing, namely, "The time is at hand." The messianic claim is a claim to be the messiah; who is stepping into the role, in the offices of the Messiah, as we talked about last time, as prophet, as priest, as king.

False messiahs' claim to be messiahs, supplanting the true Messiah, aping the ministries of the offices of Christ. So false messiahs are going to assume the prophetic office of the true Christ. They act as revealers of the truth. They want to captivate, capture the masses with their lies. They claim to step into the prophetic role. False messiahs will assume the priestly office of Christ, claiming to kind of reconcile sinners to God, to mediate between God and mankind. They are usurping God's place, usurping Christ's true place, and stepping into it and saying that they are his representative. They come in His name.

False messiahs will assume the kingly office of Christ. They'll come as political saviors, military heroes. They'll, be, have amazing leadership, compelling charisma, captivating people with persuasive power. They will wield God like authority over

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people. And Jesus says in Luke 21:8, many will come that way. Many. Firstly, "the many will come in my name," that is in the name of Jesus himself. Secondly, the many will come saying, "I am he!" That is, they will make a specific, deliberate claim to be the Messiah. And thirdly, the many will come saying, "The time is at hand." That is a specific and deliberate claim to come and fulfill God's prophetic promises.

All three of those elements are joined together, "in my name," I am He, I'm the Messiah, and the time is at hand. All three of those things. There will be a high concentration of these false messiahs, and there will be messiahs like that, who come according to this description, that Jesus carefully gave us. Listen, the world has never seen that, at any stage in its history. Ever have, never seen that.

There are those who want to broad brush, paint with a broom, any and all false prophets, any and all false religious leaders, any and all false religious or political leaders. They want to look back through history and paint with a broom. They're not following the carefully drawn lines that Jesus has put on the

canvas for us. And people who do that trying to find false messiahs, who don't call themselves messiahs, but they find them in history anyway.

When they do that, they confuse the issue and they confuse the church. And they do that by failing to give due careful attention to Jesus' actual language; to the meaning of his actual words. And that is why future believers and all of us in the meantime, we have to be intentional to avoid deception. See to it, as in watch very carefully. Beware. Take heed. Believers have to be on the lookout for these deceivers, for their deceptions, because at that time, at this beginning time of the tribulation, there will be a very high concentration of many convincing false messiahs. If it were possible, they'd deceive even the elect. They're that good.

Have we seen that in history? False messiahs, false christs, you need to understand, are on a whole different level of boldness and brazenness and deception. And we can understand that once the Church has been raptured, the tactics of Satanic deception are going to shift, adapting to the new situation,

responding to this new environment, and finding a new opportunity to take charge of a narrative and convince the unbelieving world that they are the true messiah.

Now, I've, I've, said this, and I'm gonna say it again today, that not everybody sees the text this way, as I'm describing it. Which brings us to a third question, which is the 'when' question. When is this gonna happen? When, number three: When are they impersonating Christ? When are they impersonating him? And as I've said, this is a contested point. In fact, it is 'the' contested point about the Olivet Discourse, which is influencing how people interpret the whole discourse; also, John's Revelation as well; other New, New Testament passages about the future.

There are some who believe that the future events Jesus is predicting, predicting, in the Olivet Discourse, those events they believe are fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. They're called preterists. The, the, Latin term is *prater*, which means, past, so what they're saying is that most, and some even, go so far as to say all of what Jesus predicted. But many

say most of what Jesus predicted has already happened back in AD 70. This whole Olivet Discourse wrapped up in AD 70.

There's a minority who are full preterists. Those who believe all prophecies, here, were fulfilled in AD 70, including, by the way, the Second Coming of Christ. So, if they believe that, and they are full preterists, in that way, that means they are not Christians. Because belief in a future Second Coming of Christ is a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, which means you can't believe the Second Coming has already happened and still be a Christian.

The many, many preterists within our camp or within an evangelical camp say the same thing. They say, yes, if you are a full preterist and you believe the Second Coming has already happened, you're not a Christian. So they have to, they have to draw the lines very carefully for themselves within the preterist camp. So the rest of those who true evangelicals are called partial preterists, they believe some or if not most of the prophecies about the end are not so much prophecies about the end of the world. But they're prophecies about the end of

Jerusalem, the end of Israel, and they are all fulfilled in AD 70.

Now, just to avoid being too wordy and, you know, getting my own tongue tied up in the language here, I'm gonna use the word preterist to refer to the Christians who are partial preterists. Okay? So I'm gonna use preterist just to speak of those. If they're full preterist, they're not Christians. But I'm gonna speak about the partial preterist. Just using the word preterist. Okay?

Amillennialists, those who believe that the 1000 years of Revelation 20 should not be taken literally, but should be taken instead as, as, figurative of a long period of time; they believe that the millennial kingdom is underway during the church age and that is called Amillennialism. They're preterists. Postmillennialists, as well, those who also take the 1000 years of Revelation 20 as a figure of speech, of a long period of righteousness on the earth. And after that time, post, that long period of time, Jesus returns. They're also preterists.

Both Amillennialists and Postmillennialists are preterists. They're partial preterists. They claim that most of the events that Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. Now there are others, who are premillennialists, that believe that Jesus will come before the thousand-year reign on the earth. The Second Coming will come first and then the thousand-year reign on the earth, when Jesus sits on David's throne and rules from the city of Jerusalem; literally, physically.

Some of these Premillennialists, they also teach that the events of verses 8 through 11 are being fulfilled now, in some way, in the church age and being ramped up; that this started in AD 33 or AD whatever, right after Christ's ascension, and has, has, continued, and continues to grow with a strength, kind of like, some say, with labor pains. All this time of 2000 years is, man, that's a long labor, right? So, regarding these false messiahs, in particular, let's just limit our conversation today to just the false messiahs.

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Just the first of the beginning of birth pains; the first pain being false messiahs. Regarding them, on the one hand, as Amillennialists and Postmillennialists, as preterists, they believed that there were a bunch of these false messiahs that popped up between Jesus' ascension in AD 33 and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. 37-year period of time, bunch of false, false, messiahs popping up everywhere. Okay.

On the other hand, there are some Premillennialists, who likewise believe, that a bunch of false messiahs popped up in the 1st century and have been continuing on through to today, and they've been proliferating and growing more numerous, more deceptive. Deceiving more, along with the other events in verses 8 through 11, they believe that that's been happening from the 1st century and continue on through history up to this very moment and will eventuate in the tribulation.

I'm about to disagree, respectfully I hope, with both of those views, and it starts right here, Luke 21:8, in clarifying the nature of the false claim to messiahship. I hope you already know what the claim to Messiahship is. I've said it, but I'm

gonna say it over again. But I'm gonna start with the preterist view, and I'm gonna try to refute the claim that a host of false messiahs showed up between the ascension of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem in the AD 70. And after I talk about that, I'm gonna deal with the idea that these messiahs, these false messiahs, not only started showing up in the 1st century, but have continued on to this very time.

So, starting with the preterist view, the first one. As I said, they say that the Olivet Discourse was mostly fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. And that means that they need to find evidence of what Jesus predicted here, verses 8 through 11, particularly the false christs. But they have to find evidence of what Jesus predicted. So false christs, war, social unrest, earthquakes, plagues, famines, terrors, and great signs from heaven. They need to find evidence of all of that between Jesus' ascension AD 33 and Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70; 37-year period of a very concentrated form of this stuff.

Now regarding the view of false messiahs in particular, before AD 70, there's one well-known, well-regarded proponent of this

view, J. Marcellus Kik, KIK, and he writes this quote, "History records but a few of the names of those who claim to be the messiah in the period from the ascension of Jesus Christ to the destruction of Jerusalem. Undoubtedly many were too insignificant to be recorded by historians." End Quote.

I agree with Kik on that point. The history records, just a few names, and I'm about to quibble with the names that are recorded. But history does record just a few names, and I also agree with Kik that others were so insignificant as to be utterly disregarded by history. But it is that admission, that seals the fate of his view, that puts his view at complete odds with Jesus' words in the text. The clear impression that Jesus is giving to his disciples, in all three accounts, by the way, Matthew 24:4 and 5, Mark 13:5 and 6, and Luke 21:8. The force of his imperative to, watch out, to see, to look for; to be intentional about the force of his imperative means that these deceivers are not only well known, but they are many, in number, and they are convincingly persuasive. So persuasive believers have to be on their guard. If it is otherwise, why should believers beware, be watchful, be, be, alert, to make sure they're not deceived.

Matthew and Mark, tells us that these times are going to be marked by a powerful deception. Matthew 24:23 and following says this, Jesus warns them. "He says if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' don't believe them. For false christs and false prophets." Note the distinction there between the two; differentiating between two kinds of deceivers. On the one hand false christs, on the other hand false prophets. They will "arise and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance," Jesus says, it's gonna be at this time.

It's gonna seem that the whole world is following after this host of would-be messiahs. It is going to require a clear head, intentional watchfulness to exercise self-control and self-discipline, in order to resist the natural impulse to go along with the whole crowd, to go along with everybody, to agree with them. There are going to be so many, in these days, who are going to go astray following these many deceivers who claim to be the christ, the true messiah

Nevertheless, the preterists that I quoted earlier and many other preterists, they try to find candidates who could fit Jesus' warning, those who live prior to AD 70, so that they can find a 1st century timeline, time frame, for this prediction to be fulfilled. Some possibilities, going to his book as a source, Simon Magus, remember the Samaritan magician from Acts chapter 8? That's one of them. Another Samaritan named Dositheos, cited by origin. Josephus writes about Felix, the Roman governor of Acts 23 and 24, who, and Felix hunted down so-called messiahs, according to this source.

Another other preterists cite similar 1st century false, supposed false, Christs. I'm not going to get too far in the weeds with you on this, and I'm not going to read every single instance in text, but I certainly can cite my sources and let you have your own thrill of discovery to read it for yourself. But I have read the sources and I'm going to try to summarize some of this and not get too far in the weeds. But if I don't refute these claims, they're going to go unchallenged and the waters of eschatology will be muddied with this kind of an error. And I don't want you to be misled. That's in keeping with the text, right?

I don't want you to be misled. So let's start with Simon Magus. Simon Magus, Magus, which meant 'great' didn't mean maggot, as some have said. It's not Simon Maggot. Simon the Great, but widely recognized by Church history as the Arch Heretic. He is the prototype of all future false teachers. Some see him as the one of the earliest to blend Gnostic ideas with Christianity and he formed, really, a new religion. And you can read how Simon got his start in Acts chapter 8 verses 9 to 24. And what you cannot find, not only in Acts 8, but in other sources from the early church fathers, you cannot find any evidence that Simon claimed to be the christ, much less did he claim "the time is at hand." You don't see any evidence of that whatsoever.

There's another named Menander of Antioch. Menander was Simon's disciple, another early Gnostic teacher. Menander was also cited in some of these books as a false christ, but he never claimed to be the messiah either. Some preterists point to another Samaritan, Dositheos, as a false messiah. Dositheos was a contemporary of Simon Magus. He was something of a rival to him. Not only did he make no messianic claim, but hardly anyone was deceived by his teaching. Some cite Origin as giving evidence of

the messianic pretensions of Dositheos. But when you go back and read Origin, you get a better picture of Dositheos and his followers. A much clearer picture. Origin says, "Even in former times they did not arise to any eminence and now they are completely extinguished so that it is said that their whole number does not amount to 30." End Quote.

So 'the many' are not carried away by their deception, even though they were deceivers, false teachers; they weren't false messiahs and the many were not carried away by their deception, much less believers. Believers were not on guard against them, just a few of them and their followers. They died out quickly. No danger at all, that, jus, Jesus disciples are going to be carried away with this massive deception.

All the early messianic figures modeled themselves not after Jesus, by the way, just this point of fact; these early so-called Messianic figures modeled themselves, not after Jesus, not after Messianic text of scripture, but rather, as Rudolf Meyer writes, their models quote, "Their models are the ideal

ruler, Moses and Joshua, who according to the tradition led Israel out of the wilderness into the promised land." End Quote.

So when they came trying to deceive people, they claim to be doing what Moses did, what Jesus did. And why would that be? Because right after Jesus was crucified, who wanted to say they were him. They'd rather deceive Israel, who just crucified Jesus. They'd rather deceive Israel by saying, we're a reincarnation of Moses or Joshua. Meyer gives another example cited by preterists. And who's another Samaritan? Mainly Samaritans are problems, aren't they? You can understand why there was an antipathy towards Samaritans in the 1st century.

But nevertheless, those, there's another Samaritan who came to prominence in AD 35; so very shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven. He came to prominence during the governorship of Pontius Pilate. Meyer says that this man wanted to quote, "Wanted to show his followers the temple vessels traditionally hidden by Moses on Gerizim." Apparently, the miracle would prove that he was the initiator of the ideal mosaic age marked by the Tabernacle. So the procurator, that is the Roman governor,

Pontius Pilate, procurator, understood the movement thus and nipped it in the bud. Pontius, after Christ especially, did not want any more trouble from any people like this.

Preterists also refer to Theodas as a messianic figure.

Gamaliel mentions Theodas in his Sanhedrin speech, as recorded in Acts 5:36 recorded by Luke. When you give, when you give more careful attention reading about him in Josephus, you find out that Theodas called himself a prophet, not Christ, not the messiah, but a prophet. He even claimed that he would divide the river and provide easy passage to his followers after the pattern of Joshua. So Theodas was a would-be Moses, or a would-be Joshua, not Christ.

Preterists also point to the Egyptian. He's known as the Egyptian in Acts 21:38. This is the one the centurion kind of confused Paul with. When they arrested Paul in Jerusalem, they thought he was the Egyptian. Are you the Egyptian? And they, preterists, refer to him as possibly a false messiah. But Josephus himself says, "This Egyptian called himself a prophet." Again, a prophet, not a messiah. Still, this Egyptian was

successful in gathering tens of thousands of followers, so he did gather a number of followers after himself.

The Egyptian gathered his followers to Mount Olivet, of all places, said that at his command the walls of Jerusalem on the other side would fall down and he would lead his followers into Jerusalem as a type of Joshua's Jericho conquest. He would repeat that miracle. When Governor Felix heard about it, he wasn't having any of it; sent his troops killed about 400 of the followers and that others were captured or escaped, and that just disbanded the whole thing. The Egyptian himself fled, escaped as, Acts 21:38 attest to, and this Egyptian was never seen or heard from again.

So we've got Simon Magus, Menander of Antioch, Dositheos. We've got the Samaritan, Moses. We've got the Theodas. We've got the Egyptian. These are pretty weak candidates as so-called messiahs. In fact, they didn't call themselves messiahs.

Josephus doesn't record them as messiahs. Other sources don't call them messiahs, and they were hardly able to deceive, with the exception, notable exception, of the Egyptian, who did

deceive tens of thousands. But they were hardly able to deceive any, but the most gullible of their time, the most disenchanting; disenfranchised. Certainly, nobody that believers would look at and say, huh, I wonder if that's Christ.

The fact that some preterists, those who claim verses 8 through 11 and the Olivet discourses fulfilled at AD 70. The fact that some of these preterists cite these as examples of false messiahs, at the very least, means that they don't give proper weight to what has been predicted by Jesus in Matthew 24:4 and 5, Mark 13:5 and 6, and Luke 21:8.

These pre-AD 70 deceivers did not convince very many at all. They didn't put any believers in danger of going astray and falling after their deception. Why? Because they didn't say they're the christ. They didn't come in Christ's name. They didn't say, "the times at hand." They said, they're false prophets. They came in the pattern of Moses and Joshua. They came with other badness to them, certainly, but nothing that's going to deceive Christians. Godet summarizes, Frederic Godet

says, "History, it is true, does not attest to the presence of false messiahs before the destruction of Jerusalem." End Quote.

Alfred Plummer says the same thing. "We know of no false messiahs between the ascension and the fall of Jerusalem. They might be counted among the many antichrists of 1 John 2:18, but not as false christs." End Quote. He's right about that. I appreciate Plummer making the distinction, seeing the distinction in language. Words mean something. So that's where preterists stop at AD 70. They feel that once they've made their case that they think there's false messiahs prior to AD 70, going beyond AD 70 doesn't really concern them, because everything, all their case, has been made and hinges on that point.

But there are some Premillennialists who believe the false messiahs, not only started then, and they cite some of the same examples, but they just keep-on-a-comin. They think verses 8 through 11 describe the time of the church age from the days of the apostles in the 1st century all the way to the current day, culminating in the tribulation. This is a very common, very

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popular view within Premillennialism, but I would say it is also an error and it is the cause of great confusion.

I don't want you to be caught up in confusion. We go after AD 70 to, I'm gonna try to be as merciful as I can with you on some of this, okay, but some cite Simon Bar Kokhba, who is a messianic figure. Some of you have read about the Bar Kokhba revolt in AD 132 to 135. His revolt didn't take place until nearly 100 years after Jesus; didn't start till then. And Simon? It's important to note that Simon himself did not claim to be the christ. Some of his rabbinic scholars or some rabbinic scholars, in that day, had hoped he was the christ, then made that claim for him. But he himself did not say he was the christ.

Rabbi Akiva associated Simon with Numbers 24:17, as the star out of Jacob. He held the sceptre that smites Moab. Another rabbi said there was a Haggai 2:21, "He's going to overthrow thrones," starting with this revolt of course, against Rome. The Bar Kokhba revolt ended in defeat in AD 135 when the Romans killed Simon at Betar, about 5 miles from Jerusalem; end of

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Simon. Rudolf Meyer says the period after the Bar Kokhba revolt, quote, "was hostile to all forms of the charismatic. A messianic prophet was officially quite inconceivable." End Quote.

Well, why would that be? Because false messiahs get people killed, and people don't like getting killed early. In these times, in the church age, people die following false messiahs. They're actually not popular. Think David Koresh. Think Marshall Applewhite. Think people like that? Very few. What do I say? Crazy. Loonies. Disenfranchised. Disaffected people on the margins of society get caught up in some kind of a David Koresh kind of a thing. In fact, you could say the same thing about the decades immediately following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No one wanted to profess to be Christ. No one wanted to profess to be Israel's Messiah because by popular vote in the land, that hadn't worked out too well for him. Nevertheless, some soldier on.

They go on searching for false messiahs after the spectacular failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt, and I'm going to try to abbreviate this for the sake of time and sanity. But here's a

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quick list. Moses of Crete in the 5th century, he convinced the Jews of Crete. Remember Crete is an island, Okay? And there he convinced the Jews of Crete to follow him as a New Moses, not a messiah, but as a New Moses, from Crete to Palestine on dry ground. I don't know if you've looked at your map, but that is a long, long walk, even with dry ground. I'd rather fly. I'd rather, actually the ship be there, the water. Keep the water there. Let's take a boat. But they left their possessions, and they waited for the appointed day that this Moses of Crete would give them and at the command of this Moses, they threw themselves into the sea. Many drowned, others were rescued. And Moses himself, he took off. He disappeared.

Serene in the 8th century. He was a Syrian Jew. Promised fellow Jews under his leadership they would expel the Muhammadans, that is, the Muslims, from the Holy Land. And when he was arrested by the Muslim Caliph Yazid, as the Jewish Encyclopedia notes, he declared that he had acted only in jest. I was only joking, just joking. Whereupon he was handed over to the Jews for punishment. All of his followers were received back into the fold upon giving up their heresy.

David Alroy in the 12th century, one of the few actually in history who did declare himself a messiah. He was born in Kurdistan, led a Jewish uprising against the Caliphate, claiming God sent him to throw off the Muslim yoke and march the Jews back to Jerusalem. His own father-in-law assassinated him in his sleep and the movement quickly died out.

I can go on to speak about Abraham Abulafia in the 13th century or the self-proclaimed prophet, not messiah, but Prophet Nissim ben Abraham. Abraham who was touched by an Angel. That's actually the language, touched by an Angel. Maybe the TV program got its name from that, I don't know. But there's an Asher Lammlein, a self-proclaimed forerunner of the messiah. He, he, was a German. He convinced other Italians and Germans to fast, pray, give alms in anticipation of a messiah who, as it turns out, never showed up.

We could add names from the modern age as well, but the picture doesn't improve much. Rhys Evans, the Welshman of the 17th century, Ann Lee of the Shakers, the female incarnation of Christ. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the awaited Mahdi, the likeness of

Jesus. Sun Myung Moon, Jim Jones, Marshall Applewhite, Charles Manson claimed to be Jesus. Right. So many other nut cases and wackos; and after we scroll through page after page of a rogue's gallery of false religious leaders, only a few of whom overtly claimed to be messiahs; we need to understand many did not. And though in some cases they were able to rally support for their political causes, their religious cults, they were for the most part abject failures.

I hope it is clear to you, just with this brief survey, that none of these tragic figures fit the picture that Jesus drew carefully for us in the Olivet Discourse. Those who try to find false messiahs before AD 70, those who try to find them showing up from the 1st century onward, as I said, they are failing to give due weight to the distinctively messianic nature of the deception that Jesus is describing here and the brazenness and the audaciousness of these particular deceivers. Instead, wrongly, they portray these deceivers as nothing more than run-of-the-mill false teachers, as just purveyors of a false kind of Christianity or a false religion, not only common throughout history, but mostly ignored and then scoffed at. These are the

warnings that go unheeded when we don't pay careful attention to Jesus' language, His words.

Now, we do see warnings in the New Testament, don't we? Against false teachers; against false teaching. The, the, New Testament is filled with warnings like that, but they are not the same as the warning that Jesus gives here in the Olivet Discourse.

They're not false messiahs. In fact, it is noteworthy that there are no other warnings about false messiahs anywhere else in the New Testament except in the Olivet Discourse, because false christs are not a feature of the church age.

They're a feature of the time when the, when the focus shifts to Israel again, in the time of the tribulation. Warning against false teachers and false teaching, is about the interpretation of Christ. It's the claim to represent Jesus. It's a, it's about the interpretation of the apostles and what's written in the New Testament. It's about representing them. It's about preaching another christ, and another gospel, and another doctrine.

Paul summarizes the essence of false teaching that characterizes the church age like, like, this in 2 Corinthians 11:4. It's preaching another Jesus. It's receiving a different spirit. It's preaching a different gospel. 2 Corinthians 11:13 says, the warning of false apostles, deceitful workers. They disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, Paul says, "for even Satan disguises himself as an Angel of light." Therefore, it's not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. The satanic tactic of deception in the church age, since true Christians, since believers and that's really the threat against Satan and his tactics, isn't it? True Christians, true believers, we're the ones he comes after.

But his tactic of deception in the church age, since believers regard the Bible as God's word, since believers know Christ and Christ alone as "the way, the truth, and the life," since believers see the Apostles teaching in the New Testament as the only true valid interpretation of the Christ. Well, satanic deception in the church age is a mimicry of Apostolic teaching. They disguise themselves as Apostles of Christ, as ministers of righteousness, and as angels of light.

But false messiahs, false christs, these deceivers are on a whole different level of boldness, brazenness, deception. And how do we explain this? We explain this because once the Church is raptured and taken away, tactics of Satanic deception are going to shift and going to adapt to a new situation and find new opportunity to deceive the masses. After the sudden disappearance of the Church, for which the world, the unbelieving world is going to need an explanation and the false christs step in to say, I come in the name of Jesus. I am He. The time is now.

It is an interesting feature of Luke's account, as distinct from Matthew and Mark. Luke records Jesus' warning about the time element. It's not just, I am the christ, Matthew 24:5. It's not just, "I am he!" Mark 13:6, but it's also Luke 21:8, "The time is at hand." What time would that be? It's the word, *Kairos*, which in this context refers to an appointed time. Eschatologically, it's the time of the end, joined with this messianic claim, this is the claim of the Second Coming. Leon Morris writes this, "The claim to messianic authority is followed by a prediction that the time, the end time, the time

of national deliverance is near. The significance of these words should not be overlooked. Jesus was not predicting the end of the world within the lifetime of the men then living. He regarded those who make such forecasts as false prophets." End Quote.

Just to remind you, Jesus said, many will come, not a few, not scattered here and there, many will come, and firstly, they will come in my name, that is the name of Jesus. Secondly, many will come saying, "I am he!" They will make a specific deliberate claim to be the Messiah. And thirdly, many will come saying, "The time is at hand!" It's a deliberate, specific, deliberate claim to come and fulfill God's prophetic promises for the end time. It's the second coming. If we're going to give weight to Jesus' actual language and not make his words fit our particular eschatological scheme, we have to admit this hasn't happened yet.

So we got, the who, the what, the when. Here's the next question, and these points are gonna be exceedingly short in comparison to that one. Okay? But the next question, number

four is: Where is messianic impersonation happening? Where's it happening? These impostors will deceive many, which means there will be widespread deception by many false messiahs who will be massively effective. So, we're not talking about tens or fifties or hundreds or even a few thousand here and there. We are talking about hundreds of thousands and millions of people and there will be no doubt that this time is on us.

There will not be three views, four views, eight views of the time. Everybody will have the same picture. They'll look at this and they'll say, ah, that's what he was saying. Hard to be precise about the exact geographical location for messianic deception at the end of the age, but we get a hint from the next verse in verse 9, from "the wars and the disturbances," social chaos, from the international conflicts in verse 10 and the language of various places in verse 11. And the worldwide nature of terrors and great signs from heaven in verse 11, looks like false messiahs. They're gonna be popping up everywhere on the map during the Great Tribulation.

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We read earlier from Matthew 24:23 and following. I didn't finish that; stopped short of the geographic scope that comes next in the text, but let me back up and give you this. "If anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' Don't believe them. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I've told you in advance," and then this according to Matthew's account, "If, therefore, they say to you, 'Behold, he's in the wilderness,' don't go forth or 'Behold, he's in the inner rooms.' don't believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." That is to say, it's everywhere.

If the whole world will witness this coming of the Son of Man, then wherever people are in the world, every place in which there are wildernesses and inner rooms, then the deceptive parade of these false messiahs, and the deceptive claims, that now is the Second Coming, that's going to be happening all over the world as well.

Next question number five: Why are they doing this? Why are they impersonating the Christ? What's their motivation? I don't think that's hard to figure out. Why did the true Christ come? We look back to the true Christ and what he was coming for. We can kind of discern something of the false christ and what they're coming for. Jesus came first to secure the redemption of his people. Luke 19:10. "He came to seek and save the lost." Christ will come a second time to execute the full privilege of his people's redemption. According to Matthew 24:31 and Luke 21:33.

Matthew 24:31, "He'll send forth his angels of the great trumpet and they will gather his elect from the four winds from one end of the sky to the other." Bring them back to Jerusalem. Luke 21:8, when these things begin to take place, straighten up, lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. So why did Jesus come to gather a people for himself? False christs are gonna mimic that. Why are they coming as false messiahs? Why are they impersonating the true Christ? "To deceive many, including, if possible, even the elect." They'll swoop in. They'll gather people for themselves. They'll win them over to their power and to their evil purpose. So that's very brief.

But moving on; that's the who, what, when, where, why? And then finally, number six: How? How are they able to impersonate Christ? What makes them convincing? What tactics do they employ? Remember, they're convincing to many. This is a widespread deception. Everybody's going to be on the bandwagon. By the time these come, there will be an Antichrist who comes, who sways the whole world. How does he get such popular vote? What makes him so convincing? Remember, not hundreds here and there. Not even thousands here and there. Not like the supposed false messiahs of history up to this point. We're talking about many deceived; widespread popular form of deception. Everybody's voting the same direction. No, two parties in those days. Or three, or four or eight, or whatever. One party; One vote. What's the appeal?

Why would anybody in their right mind follow these deceivers Again? Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22. "False christ and false prophets will arise and they'll show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." Signs and wonders, very convincing. Acts of power, very convincing. Those remaining on the earth after Jesus raptures his church, they're gonna scramble, aren't they, to dust off their bibles that their

grandmothers gave them when they were kids. They're gonna flip open the, cordon, concordance in the back, look up Second Coming references, and try to make sense of what's happening in the world. But since they're still unbelievers.

Since the many, the majority, of the world have no interest really in repenting of their sins, they're gonna remain in the futility of their minds. Even though they're fearful, even though there's craven fear that's gripping them, trying to figure out what's going on, they're gonna remain in the futility of their minds, darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, due to their hardness of hearts. And these are people who are ripe in that day for deception.

Paul writes about this time in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 through 12, is associated. This time is associated with the coming of the lawless one. In fact, it will precede the false Messiahs, will precede the lawless one. The Antichrist, the one in verse 9, "whose coming is in accord with the working of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders." If he comes in accord with the working of all power, signs, and false wonders, then it

means false signs and powers and wonders are already going on and the, the, Antichrist steps into that environment.

That's parallel exactly with Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22. And people of the world will be susceptible to verse 10, "The deception of unrighteousness for those who perish." Why? "Because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." So 2 Thessalonians 2:11, it's for this reason because they don't receive the love of the truth. They don't love the truth. Just let that ring in your ears for a minute. They don't love the truth. They don't love the words. They don't love the meanings. They have their own thing that they want to hold on to. Folks, we have to love the words.

We have to take the words of Christ seriously. They don't "love the truth so as to be saved," and so 2 Thessalonians 2:11, "For this reason God sends upon them a deluding influence, so that they will believe what is false, in order that they may all be judged, who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in unrighteousness."

So, at the beginning of the tribulation, due to the reality of personal unbelief, in a state of unregeneracy, due to the power of satanic deception; signs, wonders movement unlike the world has never seen. This is not talking about Benny Hinn and Kenneth Copeland, this is not that. Due to the judicial power that strikes them, with divine judgment to put the unrighteous under the influence of powerful delusion, so that they will believe the lie. This is what the time before the rise of the Antichrist is going to look like. More importantly, this is what the world will look like right before the true Christ, the Lord Jesus comes again.

So what application can we draw from this? I'm just going to give you one, and it's one I've kind of been already speaking about throughout the message this morning. But it's this application: It's really a heart application. It's a mentality; it's the way we think. We must pay close attention to what Jesus actually said, and let his actual language and his specific words have their due weight. Listen, we're so quick, aren't we, and ready and willing to do that in matters of justification and sanctification. Aren't we? To pay careful attention to words that secure our salvation?

All the careful, precise thinking about the words of Scripture, the words of Jesus, the words of his Apostles, they result in the doctrines of grace. They give us great confidence and assurance in our salvation, that produce what we recite every Sunday morning in the *London Baptist Confession of Faith*. They produce beautiful doxological theology that grounds our, our lives and the assurance of the gospel, that lifts our hearts heavenward to see the true glory of our God and his Savior, Jesus Christ.

If we're going to be accurate and precise about that language that leads us to that confidence and that clarity and that assurance, why don't we apply the same thinking to everything in Scripture, including prophetic scripture. Listen to the author of Hebrews, "For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable," that is, he's talking about the Old Testament, "and every trespass and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? That *salvation* first spoken by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with

them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will.”

That's why at the end of time, in the great Tribulation, there are going to be false signs and wonders; because they gotta convince people and validate their message some way. Because the true Christ, when he came, God sent accompanying true signs, true wonders, true miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit to validate his messenger and his message. We gotta listen. Gotta pay close attention. Jesus, his apostles, those who heard him, they've written to us, haven't they, by the Holy Spirit recording for us in this Holy Bible the very breathed out words of God.

So, beloved, resolve in your conscience before the all-knowing God, that you will not make the words of Jesus, the Christ, or the words of his prophets and apostles fit your preferred view, but that you will adjust your paradigm so it conforms to his revealed words. So, for example, when Jesus uses the term Messiah, don't you think, of all people on the earth, that he knows the meaning and the force of the word Messiah. He uses it

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with intent. He's able to distinguish between false teachers on the one hand, and false prophets on the other hand, and false messiahs; and he did, and he used it with intent.

So submit to what he said. Scrutinize whatever you read in history or theology or whatever you read in books or blogs or whatever you hear in sermons or podcasts. Submit it all to what he actually said. Make all those sources submit to his words, never the other way around. That is the only way to honor him and his words. It's the only way to obey his command, to see that we're not deceived. It's by giving due attention to Jesus words. It's to obey him and worship him as he truly is, the only true Messiah of God.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for anointing Christ and Christ alone for our salvation. To secure our redemption, to, by his substitutionary atonement on the cross, to secure our forgiveness, to cleanse us from all of our sins by his perfect life that he lived, his act of obedience to secure our justification, so that you could look down upon us.

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And yes, you declare us to be forgiven, but even beyond that, you declare us to be righteous in Christ, that the fulfillment of all of your perfect will and law and truth and words, all the commandments and precepts, he obeyed on our behalf. So we don't come, we don't live this life, or walk this Christian life, relying on any perfection of our own. We don't have any. We find ourselves falling so short every single day. We fail in many ways, but our confidence is not in ourselves. Our confidence is in him.

We thank you that words do have meaning, and it is in the meaning of those words and the relation that those words have to one another, in the syntax and sentences of Scripture, and how those sentences form paragraphs and thoughts and produce doctrines in a full, full orb Systematic Theology that grounds us securely in Your grace. We thank you for giving us our Messiah. We thank You for saving us from our sins. We thank you for guaranteeing the hope of eternal life for us in Christ. It's in His name we pray and thank you. Amen.