



## **Christ's Kingdom Forecast-Part 1**

### **The Unexpected Postponement**

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Well I got myself in trouble with the law. Probably not the way you want your pastor to start his sermon on Sunday but I did, I messed up. I tried to be a law-abiding citizen but I messed up. I didn't mean to mess up, but I did, and it all started last summer. I was preaching in London and after preaching for several days, several hours, I had three free days to be a tourist. So, took my family on a train, we went to Paris. We had three days there, the middle day, we had the whole day, so I decided to rent a car. So all day long we had this car and I'm making my way back to downtown Paris and, allegedly, on a Parisian highway, I went a little too fast, too many kilometers per hour. Well, I didn't get pulled over, there were no lights, no sirens, I didn't talk to any officer, I just got a letter in the mail. It was all automated, kind of like our toll roads here. Now I hate to blame my wife for this, but she had to get back to see the Eiffel Tower lights on. You know, they sparkle and all, and we got to get back before they turn off, because they get turned off late at night and we were running late, and so dad got a little heavy on the accelerator and I went too fast.

And two months later, I'm safely ensconced back in Orange County, thinking all was fine, paid all my, you know, travel expenses and did all the stuff that you do when you travel and the tourist stuff and the tickets for all that. I felt like, OK, I've recovered from my vacation and then I get a very official looking letter in the mail that I can't read and read my name on it, that's about it. And I see that I owe some euros for this infraction on this suburban highway. So I did the conversion, hoping for a better conversion rate, paid my fine, sent it off and thought I was done. Then about a month and a half later I get something else that I can't read, that apparently it wasn't done properly. So then I try to get that done properly, and I'm telling you this was last July, I had a letter delivered to my office on Friday that still says I owe and now, of course, it's all late apparently, hundreds of euros for something I did in one moment on one highway last summer. One moment in time, lasting effects. So if you can practice law in France, you may need to help me out. I may get extradited this afternoon for crimes in Europe, I don't know.

But, of course, my ticket is no big deal. I hope you don't see it as a huge deal, but I think that paradigm of saying, you can make a decision at one-point in time and be paying for it for a long time, is something that, if you think about it, and if we talked more seriously about our lives, we could all find those points in our lives, can't we, to recognize how serious that is. One lapse, one judgement, one decision, one temptation, one rejection, and we can be paying for that for years.

We don't realize it when it happens but looking back on it, if you can analyze it in the rearview mirror of your life, you can see that one point right there was the departure and I recognize that I paid for that for years. That's really the essence of what we're studying here this morning as we continue through the Gospel of Luke, as Jesus tells us about the effects of a decision that the nation of Israel was making about Jesus, the Messiah, as he presents himself on Palm Sunday riding into Jerusalem.

I'd like you to turn there and look at this with me, just a few verses we'll be able to study today in Luke Chapter 21 verses 5 through 9. I want to show you what he has to say, which really is nothing more than the beginning of an expansion of what he said in Chapter 19 when he told us, in Chapter 19, after riding into Jerusalem on this donkey, fulfilling all the prophecies of the Old Testament, presenting himself as the Jewish Messiah, the son of David, God incarnate. All of this that the Old Testament said, here he was and he started to weep, it says, as he was coming into the city, he saw

the city. And in Luke 19 it said, "He wept," because he said, "if only you knew today what would bring you guys peace." I mean, here is this open-ended rhetorical statement, if you just realize that right now is your point of decision. Now there were people waving palm branches, laying down their cloaks. There was a small contingent who accepted and embraced the King.

But by and large the nation rejected him. And it was about to become crystal clear as he turns over tables on the Temple Mount, looking at this corrupted worship system, and then looking at those leaders who represented so much of the people, and they said, we completely reject you, they tried to undermine his authority, they tried to tie him up in his words and eventually they would be stirring up and inciting the crowds to say crucify him in a few days.

They were rejecting their Messiah. And Jesus here, in Luke Chapter 21 verses 5 through 9, is going to begin a discussion that's going to allow us to see how big of a deal that would be for them. Not just in the ensuing weeks but for months and years and then we can even look at it today and see that the lasting effects of what happened on that Temple Mount in that first century Sunday, still affects world and geopolitics today.

Take a look at this text with me, Luke Chapter 21 verse 5. The Matthew 24 and Mark 13 parallel passages give us more as to what's going on here. So we know that, while some were speaking of the temple, that was a small group within his apostles, his disciples, were asking, they were coming out now, the last public teaching experience of Christ was over, and as they're crossing the Kidron Valley, Jesus takes a seat up on the Mount of Olives and starts to answer the questions, as the apostles were so impressed with the temple. They were speaking of the temple, middle of verse 5, and "how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings."

Josephus tells us, some of those stones, depending on his descriptions, and some of them vary in his history of the Jews, between 40 and 67 feet long. If you've been to Jerusalem, you've seen some of the remnants of those stones. You can even see marks in the pavement from those stones being cast down. You see the foundational stones of the terrace on the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem there, but, I mean, the stones of the temple itself were fantastic. They were white marble, if they weren't gilded with gold. Matter of fact, some historians say when you came upon the city and you saw the Temple Mount, it looked like this shining, brilliant building that had come out of heaven. And if it wasn't gleaming with gold, it had this white appearance and historians said it would look like snow had fallen on this building. It was one that had been remodeled starting about 15 years before Jesus was born. Herod, trying to ingratiate himself, an Edomite, to the Jewish people, he wants to be seen as the king of the Jews and Herod the Great pours a ton of money into remodeling this temple, the temple that had been built by Zerubbabel during Ezra's and Nehemiah's day, and now it was continually being remodeled, and so much had happened in the 30 or so years of Christ's life, including the 15 years prior to his birth, and it would continue on, really, until the mid 60s A.D., a construction that went on and on. It just keeps getting better and better, and it was adorned with amazing stones and offerings.

Many people would bring offerings, we're not talking about the animals in this case, you would have so many gifts given by administrators and people of wealth and they would give carvings and they would give statues and things that would make this even more grand. And this Temple Mount was adorned with things that were not seen anywhere else in Israel. And while they're marveling at what a great center of worship this is, even if the people, who they had just seen, who were leading it, weren't all that great, the buildings were great and what it represented was great, at least that's what the apostles were suggesting. But Jesus responds, in verse 6, "As for these things that you see,

the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

If you know your history that happened under Titus who would later become the emperor of Rome in 70 A.D. He's speaking this around 30 A.D., so 40 years after he makes this statement, all this comes true. Titus had said when he came into town, "Save the temple," He didn't want the temple destroyed, but as the story goes it ends up burning anyway and it burns so hot that it melted the gold that was all over it and it began to creep through the stones of the temple and so, of course, as they went to pillage this Temple Mount, they deconstructed this with every single stone being torn apart and tipped over to try and get all the gold out that had melted in between the seams of these huge marble and limestone rocks. Every stone was upturned just as Christ said. They were all thrown down. And, of course, that must have come as a shock to the apostles. The center of worship in Israel is going to be overturned.

You are the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament. You would seemingly be reigning over Israel in a palace that sat right across from the Temple Mount. I mean, I don't understand this, "Teacher, when will these things be?" they asked him. And we learn from Matthew and Mark that he sits on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple Mount and if you've been there now, you know it's got the Dome of the Rock mosque, the oldest piece of Islamic architecture from the 7th century in our world right now. The third most holy site in all of Islam, its gilded with a gold dome, as you know. It's been rebuilt and remodeled over the years.

But if you sit there, we take pictures there when we go there, and our groups get together and you see the Temple Mount in the background, Jesus sat from that perspective looking across and spoke what is called, generally in biblical studies, the Olivet Discourse because he's on the Mount of Olives looking across at the Temple Mount, and they asked him a question. You'll see, at least in verses 8 and 9, he doesn't get to answering it. They said, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" Which, by the way, I should say "these things." Now it's clear, especially in the Mathew account, that much more is in view here than the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

What you have, and you'll see it even in this passage, hints that we're dealing with a lot more. Certainly, he's going to begin to talk about, as we take the next six weeks to go through this passage, we're going to see that he's got a lot of things to talk about regarding his Second Coming, which we now know is thousands of years removed from when he was sitting there on the Mount of Olives discussing all of this. And even in our passage we get a little bit of a hint regarding this. You'll see in verse 9, when it ends the passage that we're going to study this morning, it says in the very last line, "But the end will not be at once." The end, the "Telos" the end of this era. The end that certainly is going to involve all that he's been talking about, the coming of the kingdom, the return of Christ for a second time. But what he says in verses 8 and 9 is interesting. It's not saying, "Well, here's when this will happen. And here are the signs that it's going to happen." He basically starts to give them a warning, verse 8, "See that you are not led astray."

Now we're going to learn in a minute that's because this is going to take a while to all play out the way that God has planned it. But you've got a task here, disciples of mine, "do not be led astray," which of course he speaks to them representative of all of us through the centuries, "For many will come in my name saying, 'I am he.'" I'm not just talking about those who might step up and say, "I'm the Christ" between this statement in the 30s, either 30 or 33 A.D., and the destruction of Jerusalem. It's not about a 40-year span, although there were a couple, historians say, who said,

"Hey, I am he, I'm the Messiah. I'm the answer to your prayers."

I mean, this is talking about a long string throughout Church history and even into the end times where people will say, "I'm the one, listen to me, the time is at hand." Jesus said don't go after them. And he'll make it clear, as he already has in the Gospel of Luke, there are lots of things that make it very clear and obvious. We saw a foretaste of this kind of preaching about eschatology. Eschatology, by the way, is the word that we use in Christianity to describe the teaching about the end times. "Eschaton" or "Eschatos" in Greek is "the end." I just quoted a Greek word "telos," which is also the end, but eschaton is the completion of all the things that God has planned. So, eschatology is the study of the end times things. We've already had a taste of that as Jesus talks about the end times, saying it's going to be obvious, no one's going to mistake the Second Coming for a guy who's coming on the scene saying, "Well, I am he. And let me just tell you, I have got to convince you." No one has to convince you that Christ is coming back for a second time. When he arrives it will be plain.

Verse 9. What's going to happen in the interim? We'll talk much more about this next week as we start in verse 10 as he expands on this, but let's look at this now. "When you hear of wars and tumult..." Now there's a word you didn't use in your conversation this week. Am I right? "That party next door, that sure was a tumult over there." Tumult, it's a great Greek word. I won't bore you with the construction of it, although it does have a preposition in it which is always great to explain, but I won't take time to do that. That was a wasted sentence, but... It's "disorder." It's when things are standing well, in order and in a good place, it's when things then are just the opposite of that, they're disordered. When something rises up against the norms and messes it all up. It's like putting everything in a blender. When things seem chaotic. When there are wars and chaotic goings on in culture, do not, here's our command, "do not be terrified." Why? "For these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once." You've got a long time, and now we know it's at least 2,000 years, of dealing with this interim period of having a lot of stuff going on including wars and cultural upheaval, but we're not supposed to be afraid, because everything is right on schedule. They must take place in God's sovereign plan and the end won't be immediately, even in 40 years when you see the destruction of the temple and all the stones being wedged apart and overthrown.

And what we must do this morning is spend a little bit of time understanding this in the broader context of Scripture. So allow me, if you would, to take this first point and give you a little bit of what I understand to be the biblical teaching on what God is saying about the nation of Israel and its worship center here.

Number one on your outline. Let's get you started on this this way. "Understand Israel's Judgment." Clearly there is judgment on Israel. Why? Because on that Palm Sunday, representing so much of what they'd already done in rejecting Christ, they were officially rejecting their Messiah. The rejection of the King of Israel, the Messiah of Israel, had repercussions. What are the repercussions? There's going to be a destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, there will be a complete destruction of the temple and all of that will go away because you've rejected your Messiah. Theoretically you could say, had they embraced their Messiah, we would have the kingdom ushered in. But as we already saw in Chapter 19, many thought the kingdom was going to appear immediately and Jesus knew it wasn't going to appear immediately, because they were going to reject him. So there's going to be a postponement. We are going to talk about that more in detail next week.

But let us understand in Scripture that when it comes to God's promises regarding the Davidic throne being occupied by the ultimate son of David, sitting on a throne in Jerusalem over the people

who were descendant from Abraham, the people of Israel, the genetic offspring of Abraham, fulfilling all the promises of the twelve tribes of Israel, all being completely inside the borders of the land, living in peace and harmony, the lion laying down with the lamb, and all the promises that God told us about Ephraim and Jacob being reassembled, having the northern tribes, the southern tribes and everybody back together and everything being great, because the son of David is sitting on a throne, all of that, we understand, is postponed.

And in this passage, we'll see, as we continue to unfold this in the next six weeks, we'll see that all of this one day will then be revived and we'll understand that God will get back to dealing with his people of Israel, once, as the passage says, look at verse 24, and just get into the beginning of it, "They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles," and here's a great and important word, "until," bottom of verse 24, "the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

We are now living in the "Times of the Gentiles," which technically you could argue started all the way back in Nebuchadnezzar's day in the 6th century B.C., when we had the overthrow of the temple the first time. Because we've never had a Jewish king reigning on a throne since that time and we have had, though we've had Zerubbabel's temple and we've had Ezra, Nehemiah. We've had relative peace. It didn't take long after the Babylonians destroyed it. We certainly had the Persians, the Mido-Persians, give a strong hand of leadership over what went on on the Temple Mount, there was no autonomy there. You didn't have the Hellenistic kingdom that Daniel talked about rising up. And what did they do? Well, they produced a guy named Antiochus Epiphanes who came in and sacrificed a swine, a pig, on the altar. You had then a big battle with the Maccabean family, Judas Maccabeus, come back and retake that. We never had a king, we had a temple, that's for sure. You had Herod come in and ingratiate himself by putting a lot of money into the temple and it looked like the heyday of Israel now, and yet, within 40 years it's going to be destroyed.

Now, go to Israel and on the Temple Mount, where you should see the temple of God's people, you see a Islamic mosque, which is the source of all kinds of contention between real devout and Orthodox Jews and people there all throughout the surrounding Arab countries and Muslim countries. We've got a Time of the Gentiles that is taking place. Gentile, of course, if you don't know, means any nationality outside of Israel. And all of that, the trampling of that piece of real estate and that city, the capital of that nation, all of that is going to be really chaotic until the Times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. "Until." What does that mean? There must be a time when this is all going to come to an end.

There are two ways to look at the Bible's data on God's promises regarding Abraham. Go back in your mind to the first promise God made in Genesis Chapter 12, it's a key chapter, you should know this by memory. Genesis 12, it's called the Abrahamic Covenant. God makes a promise and he says, "Hey, I'm going to pick you and through you Abraham I want to create a nation, a great nation. You are going to have so many descendants, like the sand of the seashore, and if they are against you, then I'm going to be against them, and if they're for you, then I'm going to be for them, I'll bless them. And out of you," ultimately, as he reiterated it in Chapter 15 and Chapter 17 of Genesis, "there's going to come one that will be a blessing to all the people." At the end of Genesis God makes that clear, "you're gonna have a leader who is going to come and rise up from the Tribe of Judah and every nation of the Earth will be blessed in you."

So we know this: God's got a plan that involves Israel and through Israel there will come blessing to all the nations. Well, this is taking place. What's happening is the rejection of the Jewish Messiah is

now, as we see in the book of Acts, which is the sequel to Luke's Gospel. Right? He writes another book called The Acts of the Apostles, and he shows us how now the turning of all the blessings of salvation, at least connecting with the King and having our sins forgiven, all of that now goes to the Gentiles. The spotlight shifts from Israel and it goes to the Gentiles. And the Gentile nations begin to grow. And we see the Church among the Gentiles dominate. And we sit here today, most of us in the room at least, non-descendants from Abraham, all the Gentile nations, and we're preaching from books of the Bible that were the corpus and the library, the Holy library, of the Jews. And, of course, the New Testament, as Christ comes in and says, "I'm the fulfillment of all of that," and we sit here today singing songs about the Jewish Messiah.

All of that you can look at the biblical data and say, I guess God then is done with all those promises for Israel. Specifically, that is called "a-millennialism." The millennia means a thousand years. Revelation Chapter 20 describes a thousand years and here's some of the words involved in it, "thrones" "reign." Christ is going to reign. Satan is going to be bound, there's going to be a time of peace for 1,000 years.

You can have a view that now what's happened is because Israel has rejected their Messiah, God destroyed their temple in 70 A.D., he's done with them. He wipes the slate clean and he says, "Okay, Acts of the Apostles, come on in Gentile nations, I'll have a Gentile church now and all those promises to Israel, we'll just kind of see them and count them as fulfilled in the Church. "A" means not. It's a negation. Right? In our English language. A-millennial. There is no millennium, and what they mean by that is all those promises will certainly not be fulfilled in that 1,000-year period or any other period, because they are being fulfilled now in US, there is no specific returning of the Jewish people, of the descendants of Abraham, to the land. There's no reconciliation of the northern tribes and the southern tribes. They don't live in the land with David sitting on a throne in that physical place. A-millennialism, none of that takes place. That's one way to look at the biblical data.

I think the word "until" in verse 24 of our passage, not to mention so much of the rest of Scripture, would militate against that view. Matter of fact, turn in your Bibles, if you would, to two passages. Let's start with this one. Romans Chapter 11. Let's go to Romans Chapter 11 and let me show you a Jewish apostle who has now made his ministry all about winning as many Gentiles to Christ as possible. The Apostle Paul writing to the center of the Roman Empire, writing a letter to the Romans, here's what he says about the Jewish people. Drop down to verse 28. The context, of course, if you look at it, he's quoting Isaiah 59 in verse 26, referring to a deliverer coming from Zion to Jacob, talking about his covenant, taking away their sins, which was found in Jeremiah 31, Jeremiah 34, and lots of other places in the Old Testament, the promise of that forgiveness that would come when the Messiah arrived. All of that promise, talking about Israel, he says, "As regards the Gospel," now, verse 28, these Jewish people, the people of Jacob, the people of God's descendancy from Abraham, "they are enemies for your sake." In other words, they are against your message.

Paul would go into the synagogues every week, reason from the Scriptures, the Old Testament 39 books of the Bible, and he would try to convince them that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. And they opposed him. They ran him out of town. They threw rocks at him. He won a few people to Christ but most of them rejected him. He said, fine then, knocked off the dust, and in God's plan, he said I'm turning to the Gentiles and he made his ministry all about winning Gentiles to Christ. So, "they're enemies for the sake of our message," they reject Jesus as the Messiah.

But, "as regards election," God's choice, go back to the picture of Abraham being told, I'm going to pick you and your descendants and then build on that and see his promise of the land, in the Book of Deuteronomy, his promise of a king who would come from the loins of David, in Second Samuel 7, and you have the promise of Jeremiah 31. The New Covenant would come when God would assemble his people, all throughout the book of Ezekiel you would have this great fulfillment of God doing what he said he was going to do with the nation of Israel, regarding his election, his choice. "They are beloved," current tense, "for the sake of their forefathers," because God made a promise to their patriarchal forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That promise, he says, is not going away, verse 29, underline it, "For the gifts," to Israel, "and the calling..." Right? This covenant election that he made, "they're irrevocable." It's a one-way street.

We talk about our women studying Hosea, whose first mistake was marrying a woman named Gomer, not to mention she's a prostitute. But, God directed him to do that. Why? Because he says she'll be unfaithful but you're going to be a picture of me to my people Israel, you go pursue her, even though she runs from you and she's a prostitute, you win her back. That's the picture in the Bible of God's unfaithful wife. And he says, he will pursue her. That's the whole point of the book of Hosea that you gals will study. In this particular passage, it says his calling and saying, "You are my wife, you are my people, you are my descendants," is never going away. The gifts in the calling are irrevocable.

Context. What about this though? In our passage it says he's going to take their temple and destroy it. He's going to take their city, he said in Luke 19, and completely burn it. Josephus recorded how Titus came in and did that, ruthlessly. Well, verse 22, go back in up Romans 11, go to verse 22. "Note then the kindness and the severity of God," two sides here, "severity toward those who have fallen." They rejected their Messiah officially, I guess you could say, at Palm Sunday when they looked at Christ and said, "We don't want you." In essence, most of the nation did that, their leaders made that clear, they crucified him within a week and he destroyed their city. He destroyed their worship center. The message of mercy and forgiveness, it went to the Gentiles.

"But God's kindness to you," yeah, you're bunch of Gentiles, you're writing to the Romans, the center of the Roman Empire. "Provided you continue in his kindness." Now this 'you' is plural, it deals with the nation of Israel and the other nations, the Gentile nations, and a nation even like America could say, "Well in Christianity, we've been a pretty big player here, like in England." Right? We've been a player who said, we're all about Christ, we're all about the Church, at least if you go back in the history of America, you look at the walls of the monuments and go down to the Supreme Court, you can see verses inscribed in marble everywhere, because we were about, listen, Christianity. Now, it didn't mean everyone was a Christian.

And as Pastor Pete taught so often in the class across the parking lot, it doesn't mean we are a Christian nation, but it certainly meant that we were going to say, we're going to build our democracy, much like we had out of Geneva, out of the Reformation, we're going to build what we do here based on biblical principles. And guess what, God blessed that. We had a revival of Christianity, like they did in Scotland, like they did in Ireland, like they did in Wales, that they did it in England, they did it here in America. Great revivals. Edwards and Whitfield and all the rest. So what do we have? We have a great heritage of Christianity. Well, if you continue in that kindness and the Church becomes the dominant feature of your culture, well great. All that will be fine and well. Otherwise, if you decide to turn from that you, whatever Gentile nation, Gentile culture or subculture, you'll be cut off. It's not about losing your salvation as an individual, this is about nations having God turn his back on them, which could provide us with a whole another topic for a

whole another sermon. But let's leave that for another time.

Verse 23, "And even they," the Jews, "if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree," you are not a part of the covenant people of God, "and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel." Why partial? Because the guy who is writing this is a Jewish person. Peter, James and John. Jewish people.

Surely, there were Jews who were saved, but mostly they rejected him as was seen in our passage rejecting the Messiah. "A partial hardening has come upon Israel." Oh here's that word again, verse 25, "Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." So this time of a dominant Gentile church growing for centuries now, for millennia now, that's got to be fulfilled. Verse 26, "And in this way," after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, "all Israel," not back in time, you can't go back in time and save anyone who's rejected Christ in the past, from the first century through the 21st century. But at one point, after the "fullness of Gentiles comes in," on that timeline "all of Israel will be saved." You got a generation that's going to be saved. "As it is written," Isaiah 59:20, "the Deliverer will come from Zion," from God's Heavenly Palace and "he'll banish ungodliness from Jacob."

"Well, I thought he already came?" This, you could put right next to it, it must be the second time he comes. The Second Coming he will "banish ungodliness from the people of Israel." Did he do that in the first century? No, he didn't do that. But he will in the Second Coming. "And this will be my covenant with them when I..." What does it mean? "Take away their sins." Right now, every Jewish person that rejects Christ has their sins appended to them. If they do not repent, they will meet their death, stand before their judge, and have to pay for their sins themselves.

But one day, those Jewish people will largely turn to him in a mass revival, the Bible says, and they will be saved. So right now when I go and talk to someone in my neighborhood about Christ, they reject Christ, they have a certain feeling about all that, I deal with that, apologetics, evangelism. If I go down here to Temple Bethel down the street in Aliso Viejo and I talk to them, I have the same kind of conversation, they reject Christ, as I've done. I've talked to the rabbi down there and they reject Christ.

But it's different, because in this passage it says, yeah, they're enemies, just like every other enemy of the cross. They reject Christ and his propitiation and his redemption. That's true, but "they're beloved for the sake of the patriarch." What does that mean? God's not done with them yet. Understanding Israel's judgment is this: God has not wipe the slate clean. He has put things on hold and he will fulfill those promises.

I gave you one word, a-millennial. Here's the other option as I read the Biblical data, "pre-millennial." Pre-millennialism is the belief that in that 1,000-year period, that must be the scene where God now fulfills all the promises, words like "judging" "reigning" "thrones" all of that is there in Revelation 20. That must be the time when God fulfills his promises. We are now on the other side of that, on the "pre" side of it, it hasn't happened yet. That's pre-millennialism. That means this: that when I read about, I don't know, I go back to the Balfour Declaration at the turn of the 20th century. I can read about the U.N., I can read about in 1948 Israel becoming a state. I can read about all of those things and I can see that must be God putting these things back in place as he



promised.

Now, if you're a-millennialist, here's what a-millennialist say about all the stuff in the headlines about Israel. It means nothing. Here are the words of the most outspoken a-millennialist in our day. "It's irrelevant to anything in the Bible." Irrelevant. Now most of you come from backgrounds where you are not taught that it's irrelevant. It's very relevant. Matter of fact, we don't have time for this, but Ezekiel Chapter 34. If I had time, I'd start in verse 11, I'd read all the way down to verse 30. You can see why I don't have time. It's a big chunk of Scripture. Ezekiel 34 verses 11 through 30. I would invite you, before you go to your small groups to discuss this sermon, read that passage. It's one of many, particularly in Ezekiel, that keeps talking about the way that one day, God is going to reassemble the nations of Israel, bring them back to their homeland, and he's going to forgive their sins, and he's going to cleanse them from their unrighteousness. Why? Because they turn to the only redemption that's possible, "the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Christ will be embraced. The Jewish nation is going to accept and embrace Christ. And as Ezekiel said, there will be a temple built again. It will be the center of worship and all the symbolism of the temple, all the way back to the Tabernacle in Moses' day, will clearly point to Christ.

There will be this new celebration of the Jewish Messiah, in the context, does not have that flavor of judgment because the temple is destroyed. Instead, there is a temple erected and Christ will be honored and the people will turn to Christ. We know that's going to happen under great, great tribulation, the Bible says. It's going to take this seven-year period, it's called the 70th Week of Daniel, in Daniel Chapter 9, when God, and here's how it's also called, the Time of Jacob's Trouble, we'll have peace, and then we'll have struggle and trial, as God prepares his people to embrace his Son, and then comes in and saves them from the impending doom of the nations surrounding their borders ready to destroy them, and then he will set up his kingdom. That's pre-millennialism, particularly a view of a tribulational period that precedes a millennial period that precedes an eternal state.

See, that's a view of eschatology that, in my mind, takes passages all over the Old Testament very seriously and says, the promises haven't happened yet. Because if you read, for instance, even Ezekiel 34, it's going to necessitate this: that it's more than just the Israelites coming out of Babylon back to Jerusalem, because that certainly happens. Cyrus' decree, everyone came back. Remember we had Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel, we had all these people hauled off to Babylon and then they all came back after the exile. It was what's called a return. Well, read carefully all that you see in the prophets. They don't talk about returning from Babylon, they talk about returning from all the nations, as they're scattered all over the planet. That hasn't happened yet. And then it talks about, not the southern tribes coming back, it talks about all the tribes coming back, and all the north and the south reassembling in the land. That hasn't happened yet. That wasn't the return that was coming just a few years, 70 years, after they were taken into exile in Babylon, this is talking about a day that hasn't happened yet. It's not going to happen until the Times of the Gentiles of the trampling of Jerusalem is over.

Acts Chapter 1, the disciples after the resurrection took the resurrected Christ, looked him in the eye and said, "Is now the time you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Well Jesus said, there are a lot of people who think it is going to happen right now. It's not going to happen right now. There's going to be an interval. He didn't tell us how long. But he did tell us a few things. He told us two things, verses 7 and 8 of our passage, he said, "listen, don't follow false Christs." And in verse 9, the second thing he says, "don't be afraid."

Let's look at those one at a time for the time we have remaining. Number two and your outline. Look at this in verses 7 and 8, "Teacher when will these things be, what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" He doesn't answer it. Instead he gives his own answer and his answer is this, "Don't be led astray. Many will come in my name saying, 'I am he!' and 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them."

Now, there is no applicability for us if this is only about people rising up between 33 A.D. and 70 A.D., and there's nothing to preach here. But, if for us we recognize that the false Christs will continue throughout this Church Age, and even people like us in a Gentile church will be tempted to go after a false image, a false doctrine, a false concept of Christ. And I'm thinking, man, the New Testament is full of that warning, then I think there is some applicability here. We ought to think about what he's saying in this passage to people who think, "I'd sure like the kingdom to happen now." But I'm going to have to be patient, so if I'm going to be patient, I guess I should look at all the substitute Christs who are going to pop up and they're are going to be saying, as it says in the bottom of verse 8 there, "The time is at hand." "Now is the time. I'm the guy. Listen to me." There are a lot of preachers painting a picture of crisis that says, "Now is the time."

There are a lot of preachers and doctrines out there saying, "Hey, listen, if you're impatient, I can give you what you want, I can give it to you now." Impatience makes you vulnerable, and the longer you're made to wait for the coming of the kingdom, the more you're vulnerable to people saying, "Well, I can give you a taste of the kingdom now."

Number two on your outline, let's make sure that we don't let impatience turn us into a heretic. "Don't Be an Impatient Heretic." Sorry to suggest that you might be a heretic. Heretic. Do you know that word? Oh, that sounds pejorative and I guess it is. But if you get back to the Greek word "heretic," it's a transliterated word, by the way. Heresy. Think about 8 or 9 times in the Greek New Testament it shows up. Heresy, if you look at the root of that, what it is, it's the word "choice." It's the word "option." They're basically saying, "If you don't like the Christ of the Bible, I got an option for you." There's one way to look at it. "Here's an option, if you don't like the truth, the path of the truth, here's an off-ramp for you, you can take this off-ramp."

The context here is, I'm going to make you wait and a lot of things are going to happen, they're going to be people stepping in going, "No. Let me give you an alternative. Here's an option." That's called heresy. Because the Christ of the Bible is the one we're to follow and here's what he said, "Wait and be patient." "In the interim, we got a lot of trouble you're going to go on between my first coming and my second coming, but you guys hang in there and don't follow false images of who I am. Don't take the wrong view of who I am. Don't follow a false Christ."

Without stretching this too far, I just want to say there are plenty of false Christs presented to people like us in our generation today, and they're all based on wanting aspects of the kingdom now. Let's talk about the first one. A, B, C, and D. Ready?

Letter A. People want to give us kingdom prosperity now. They offer us a Christ of the prosperity gospel because, you know what, if you read the promises, even as the one I had hoped to have time to read in Ezekiel 34, it's all about prosperity, it is about God bringing blessings. Matter of fact, we get that phrase from that old hymn, "showers of blessings." Smile at me if you remember that phrase, "showers of blessings." (Singing) "There will be showers of blessings." Remember that song? No, you don't. You want me to sing more of it? You don't. OK. That comes right out of that passage. You know what that passage is about? The millennial kingdom. I'm not saying you're a



heretic for singing that song. I know we all want showers of blessings, don't we? A weird way to put it, but it's a biblical phrase, "showers of blessings."

You know when the showers of blessings are coming? When Christ comes back. When he takes the people of Israel and cleanses them from their sin and he expels the ungodly and he sets up his kingdom. Then there will be showers of blessings, prosperity, it talks about plantations being rich and full of people eating to their full, lying down with the lamb, it says in Isaiah. It'll be great. You know what people say? "I want that now. It's in the Bible. Give it to me now."

You know there are prosperity preachers right now preaching to crowds that make this crowd look like a family meeting, and they've got tons of folks eating every word those preachers say. Because you know what they're offering? A Christ of prosperity. And all that is, is the impatience of people like us learning this: that between the first coming and the second coming, you have no guarantee of prosperity.

Matter of fact, it may be that the government, like it did in the book of Hebrews, will come to 21st century people, perhaps, and say, we're going to confiscate all your property because we feel you're a threat to our culture. It doesn't seem very realistic to you. Right? Because you've got all your money safely ensconced in various places. Maybe you're a successful businessman and you think you'll be just fine being a Christian, living by Christian principles in our day, in our culture, in our economy. But one day, it may be, ask your great grandchildren how it will go, if it continues on this path, if you can hold to biblical truth and not have your very economic sustainability threatened. They will confiscate our property.

There's no promises that were going to be economically rich or prosperous. I mean, we're just at the beginning edge of that in America where we're dealing with things like, you know, the tax deductibility of gifts to the church, or even the tax deductions for a church. All those things are soon to go away. Mark my words, they're soon to go away. They're going to go away. We just had a great little season where our culture seemed to embrace biblical principles and it was all good and fine, but eventually we've lost this culture war, as you know. And so we're moving toward a place where we're going to get back to what a lot of 1st century people had to deal with and that was, do you bow to Caesar or do you continue to bow to your foolish, old book of fables about Jesus. And people suffered for it financially. Well, a lot of people want kingdom prosperity now, so they will opt for the Christ of prosperity preachers.

We'll read more about what goes on in the kingdom and you'll see this: when a man dies at 100 everyone will say, "Ah, poor guy." They will grieve him in the millennial kingdom like he's an infant. They'll say, "What happened? Well, Shirley died at 140, what did she do wrong? That's horrible." I mean there will be longevity, there will be health. Some people want kingdom health now. Therefore, they'll offer you the Christ of the faith healers. Have you ever met the Christ of the faith healers? Well, he doesn't exist, but they'll paint a picture for you that basically says this: "If you have faith, you can be well, you'll be healthy." Now, I don't need to go through this. You know this. Right?

I've often said, there should be groups of people in these churches who are 200 - 300 years old, I would think. Right? But it's funny, they die of the same things we die of, at the same rate we die of, and their theology makes zero difference in terms of their health, because they end up dying the same way that we do. As a matter of fact, some of the most prominent faith healers die of the same kind of cancer and their lives are cut short even before ours are. I'm thinking to myself, really, this

doesn't work for the leaders and the teachers? Come on. I hope you're not buying the Christ of the faith healers.

Yeah, there is a promise of healing, a promise of prosperity in terms of our bodies, longevity. But right now Jesus said this: you can have all this tribulation in the world until I come back. Matter of fact, the promises of Genesis 3 will continue on and that is this, you're going to get sick and you're going to die. That's on my calendar. I know that's going to happen. We're all going to get sick and die if an accident doesn't take us out first.

They want kingdom healing now. Which, by the way, there are very subtle forms in evangelicalism. I hate to step on your toes, all of you who are out there trying to peddle something in the name of Christ that's supposed to make my life healthier and better and make me live longer. Stop it with all of that! Oh, I know we'd like to be healthy, I'll eat carrots, I do, fine. Let's try and be healthy, but let's not think that we're going to wrap this in a Bible verse and try and present it to people as though God wants you prosperous and your skin to glow and not to be bald and all that. Stop with the nonsense, because it's not Christ's agenda to bring you kingdom healing now. Oh, it'll come. All right. Well, you're fortunate I don't have a lot of time because that one, that one could hurt.

Number three, let's just get general here, but it's a specific form of evangelicalism. People want kingdom society, kingdom culture now. They want a kingdom society. What is that? Well, they offer you the Christ of the social gospel, the Christ of the social gospel, which means this: that if we're really Christians, we'll care about all these issues that everyone else in the liberal world are concerned about. We ought to be about equality, we ought to be about reconciliation, we ought to be about getting poverty out of the way, and all these things and the inequities of the geopolitics today. Listen, I understand they're all good and fine. If I see an old lady getting beat up by the side of the road as I'm driving home from church, I'm not going to go, "Well, the world's going to go down the tubes anyway, hope she does all right. Hang in there Ethel." I mean, I'm going to stop my car and I'm going to try to intervene. Just like the good Samaritan on the road to Jericho, let's help. You see an old lady getting beat up, get out of your car and help. OK?

But my job as a pastor and your job as a Christian and our calling as a church is not to solve the social ills of our culture. That's nothing but a distraction, you understand. And Satan is going, "Yeah, fantastic. I got the church doing exactly what the culture wants to do, and to do that you've got to give up time, and what Jesus said to those people, who said, "Is now the time you are going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" He said, "No, here's your plan. You go back and you wait for the Spirit and the Spirit is going to empower you to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth."

We've got to now get the Time to the Gentiles completed when everyone who God is appointed to eternal life, joins this band in this largely Gentile church, and then the "until" will happen. We'll get back to the promises of Israel. They want kingdom society now. A lot of discussion in Ezekiel 34 about justice and harmony and all that. That's coming. But for now, a lot of evil in the world, my job is to preach the Gospel and call people to repentance. Will that change society? Sure. I guess one person at a time. My goal is not to reform society.

Some people just want the kingdom to arrive on their calendar. They want kingdom arrival, they want it now. That's the Christ of the Second Coming date-setters. Do you know those? They dwell among us and they write their books and they sell better than any book I've ever written, because they're all about tying headlines to when Christ is supposed to come. You can go back to Hal

Lindsay, if you want to go back to an evangelical subcultural movement that got everyone excited about Christ coming back in the 80s. You understand this. Whether it's Jack Van Impe, whether it's Hal Lindsay, or you want to go into the real cult genre, Joseph Smith was a date-setter. Charles Taze Russell of the Jehovah's Witnesses was a date-setter, Ellen G. White was a date-setter. William Miller before that was a date-setter. The "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988," remember that movement, if you're old enough to remember it? How about Harold Camping, that wasn't too long ago, setting dates for the return of Christ, pulling out subway banners, telling us when Christ was going to return.

Christ made it very clear, the end will not be at once. Now you say, "Well, it's not at once the more," that's fine, and he also said to the disciples when they said, "Is now when you're going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" What did he say? "It's not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has set in his own authority. I got a plan for you, be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth." Stop writing books about date-setting and start writing books about evangelistic methods or apologetics or presenting the truth to people in persuasive and reasonable ways. Our job is to represent Christ. That's going to require patience as it says James 5 verses 7 and 8, great passage. "Be patient brothers, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer," he says, "got to wait, wait for the early rains and the late rains. But you got to be patient, establish your hearts," establish your hearts, maintain that confidence in Christ, "for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

What does that mean? He's always been saying that, it said that in the first century, it's at hand. I understand that. The next verse he describes it this way, "The Judge is standing at the door." At any point, Christ could break through the door. I've got to be with the mindset that the impending return of Christ could happen at any moment. And that's how we need to think. And he said, that will be, I hope, the established heart of having a kind of tenacity to believe in the biblical Christ, and not the Christ of the prosperity preachers, faith healers, social gospel advocates, or Second Coming date-setters.

Enough with the blood moons and the Rosh Hashanah statistics. I don't wait for the blood moons to expect Christ's return. Do you? You shouldn't. If you don't know what I'm talking about, congratulations.

Verse 9. I'm going to leave you with this. "You can hear of wars and tumults," cultural chaos, "do not be terrified. These things must first take place, the end will not be at once." We're going to get into all this, as you see in verse 10, if you're looking ahead on your Bible there. He's going to get in more detail about nations against nations, earthquakes, famines, pestilence. We'll deal with that next week. But this week, let's just understand, he's telling you not to be afraid. Not to be afraid of all this that's going on now, can only happen if you know the destination is sure. In other words, I know that I'm not going to freak out about this road being bumpy if I know the person who told me about the directions said, the road is going to be bumpy but you're going to get there. Go through the bumpy road and then you'll arrive. I have to believe the promises of Christ and I have to believe them ruthlessly. I have to believe them tenaciously. I have to, number three, "Fearlessly Trust in God's Promises."

There was a lawsuit at Dunkin' Donuts that resulted in a class action settlement that this man, Mr. Polanik, won a \$500 incentive award, they call it in these class action lawsuits, because Dunkin' Donuts said they would serve their bagels with butter and they really served them with margarine. And he sued them. And he won.

OK. This is not an illustration about frivolous lawsuits, although that is a frivolous lawsuit. It's about the fact that someone is willing to say, if my guy at Dunkin' Donuts tells me he's giving me butter, he'd better give me butter. I think that's a good practice of commerce. Make promises and keep them. But if I go to Dunkin' Donuts today, knowing that they're being held to keep their promise and I ask for a toasted bagel with butter, please. And the response was this: you will have your butter in all its buttery glory. You will have it. And if the clerk then said to me, "I, as a Dunkin' Donuts clerk, my words..., I mean, heaven and earth can pass away, my words will never pass away. Here is your butter Doctor Fabarez." Guess what I'm going to think? I'm getting butter on my bagel.

Jesus, in our passage, by the time we get to verses 27 and 33, says just that. The Son of Man is coming in a cloud with glory, great power and great glory. He sums it up by saying, "Heaven and earth," verse 33, "will pass away but my words will not pass away." I hope you recognize, as bumpy as this culture gets, as tumultuous as this culture gets, no matter how bad it seems to be in your life or in our world, Jesus promised he's coming back. That may be a simple way for us to end this sermon, but you need to fearlessly believe that. Not afraid. Not afraid. I know that all the bumps, all the wars, all the trouble, all the pestilence, all the issues of calamity, they're all right on schedule.

Christ is establishing his people in Israel, who will one day turn to him in a great revival with 144,000 Jewish missionaries winning them to Christ. Even those headlines, that a hundred years ago, would be hard to have any thought that the Belfour Declaration was ever going to result in a real nation of Israel, even that should give us some... I mean, we see signs of God's faithfulness in our day. But the Bible is filled with that kind of faithfulness.

Second question on the back of your work sheet before you go to your small groups, I've asked you to spend some time in Second Peter Chapter 3. The mockers will come and they've come right now and you know there are people who look at a sermon like this and say, "You guys really believe Jesus is physically coming back?" He is. And he says don't be dissuaded, don't be discouraged, and certainly, as you look at the headlines, don't be terrified. Christ is going to keep his promises. And this world, as we know it, will be over. You ought to be preparing for the next world.

Can you imagine sitting on a beach under an umbrella in Hawaii having your phone buzz and you get this notification: "Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill." There were some people in our church who were there, by the way, when that happened in January. I mean, this is not a drill. That's what it said. 38 minutes, you know the story, it just happened this year, 38 minutes went by before they rescinded that and retracted it. And you see videos, you've seen the videos, people running their kids into manhole covers and... Crazy.

I just wonder this morning if they got another buzz on their phone and it said, "Ballistic missile incoming threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill." I wonder how many less people would seek shelter. I'm not just taking a bash at the date-setters but that doesn't help us, you understand. When the date-setters set dates about the return of Christ and it doesn't happen. And they've heard us Christians talking about the end of this world and the establishment of the next, and as it says in Second Peter 3, one day this whole place can be done. Christ is going to set up his kingdom after the Battle of Armageddon, as we know it in Revelation 19. We're going to have that millennial kingdom set up and everyone's going, "Oh yeah, yeah, I've heard that, turn or burn, turn or burn. I don't believe it."



Hawaii was the first state to put into action a ballistic missile threat program. And they put it into action because they thought this was a real possibility and one day we ought to be able to warn our citizens. I know that at this point there may not be as much confidence in that system as there should be. But Christ has never given us a false alarm. Christ is the one who has told us the truth. People have messed and twisted his words to try and say something he never said. But you and I, we ought to be hanging on the truth that, while it may take a while, "Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii."

I mean, all that is true, as it says and Second Peter 3, this world as we know it is going to be over. But we, believing this promise of God, look forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. Can we live this week fearless? We're not freaked out. Our neighbors are going to get increasingly freaked out as this world continues down a path that Christ said it's going to continue. We need to be paragons of courage and strength. The righteous are as bold as a lion. Time for us to not be afraid, but to continue to hold out the words of life that there is shelter. There is a way out. We need to be emissaries and ambassadors of that great message. Understand Israel's judgment. It's for a time. I don't want you to be impatient and start to grasp for a false Christ, instead and wants to fearlessly and forever trust the promises of God.

Let's pray. God, help us to never doubt your Word. It's true. You bat a thousand on every prophetic word you've ever said. And now, when it comes to our day and our generation, we're seeing the stirrings of your promise, like that dry bones prophecy of the Old Testament as we see the nation, the descendants of Abraham coming together. Even that is an encouragement to us that what people have doubted for a long time is true and one day every promise you've made will be fulfilled.

God, we talk about your promises and we want to claim them, but there are a lot of painful promises in your Word, and we know that those should lead us and motivate us and encourage us to cling to the hope of the Gospel, the grace and the mercy found in the love that was displayed on the cross. So help us to make sure we're right with you today and as we leave this place may we go out this week as bold, gracious, unrelenting spokespersons of your truth. Thank you so much that one day you will come back for your Church. You'll take us into your presence as you said, John 14, you go and prepare a place for us, you're going to come again to receive us unto yourself, that where you are, we'll be also. We look forward to that day. May it be soon.

In Jesus name, Amen.