10-14-23

Matthew 24:1-14

When we as Christians see things taking place in Israel like what are happening now, we can’t help but wonder, “Is this the end?” Well, I don’t know; but perhaps it is a good time to consider some of the things Jesus told us here, along with our response to what is taking place.

First, we have to remember that the actions that started the current war between Israel and Hamas is nothing but evil and is driven by satan. There are lots of political and ideological reasons for this attack on Israel; but behind them all is the devil. Jesus told us that satan was a murderer from the beginning. He is driven by an unreasonable and deep-seated hatred of God. The intensity of that hatred is evidenced by how God’s chosen people have been treated from the beginning; and even to this very day.

It is also evidenced by the world-wide treatment of Christians. Satan hates the people of God.

And keep in mind Ephesians 6:12; “*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*” By quoting this verse, I am not meaning that we must never confront other people or that Hamas is somehow excused for what they have done. Human-beings bear responsibility for their actions. Israel must defend itself.

My point is that what has taken place is deeply spiritual. Because it is spiritual, spiritual warfare must be used. And because we are Christians, we are not only citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we are also part of its army. This is a fight we are called into and it’s obvious that there is nothing we can physically do regarding the situation. Prayer is our only option, and it is our best and most powerful option. Israel is still God’s chosen people; a people special to Him and special to us because they brought forth the promised seed that would crush satan’s head.

Until the time of Christ manifest upon this would, Israel has been the focal point of mankind’s redemption. But the people of Israel, as a nation, rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Because of that, we see in the book of Acts, that Christianity rapidly spread to the Gentile nations and peoples. On one hand it is a great shame that Israel rejected Jesus. On the other hand, it is a great benefit to we who are not of the chosen people. In Jesus, we become the spiritually chosen people; we become a nation of priests and spiritual children of Abraham.

Because of these things, we are currently living in what we call the church age. Israel is in the background while peoples are being evangelized and brought to Christ. But the time will come when Israel will again be at the forefront and all the promises and prophecies of God to Israel will come to pass. And while Israel seems to have been in the background for centuries, God has been arranging things, preparing to get His people’s attention and bring them to Jesus.

The Bible points out to us that time and again, Israel turned from their God; and time and again God brought foreign armies against them. They have seen these kinds of atrocities committed against them over and over throughout their history. God uses other nations as a rod of correction to discipline His people. And make no mistake, Israel has once again turned from Yahweh. They are at best a secular nation and even those who hold to strict orthodox Judaism are still estranged from God because of their refusal to accept His Son.

At the same time, the Bible and history are clear; God follows through on His promise to Abraham that all those who curse him will be cursed. Any nation that has attacked the Jews has been destroyed or greatly reduced in numbers and power. Hamas will be no exception. More importantly, those who die with the blood of Israel on their hands, who have not since been washed in the blood of Christ, will suffer eternal torment and separation from God. God will not be mocked and those who curse His people will not be left unpunished.

We know from the Bible that Israel will be very much in the front of the worldview during the end times. We also know that it will be a violent time for them. It is important for us to deal properly with what we know to be the end of history. And the first thing to keep in mind is that we will not know the end until it happens. Jesus is very specific about the timing of His return in Matthew 24:36, “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone*.”

So, we should not spend any time at all trying to figure out exactly when Christ will return to establish His Kingdom here on earth. To do so would be defying God. He has told us; let us strive to be content in knowing that He is God and His timing will be perfect; we will know it when it happens. Perhaps our best bet is to live as if He were coming tomorrow.

Along with that comes Jesus’ warning to not be deceived. If someone tells you that they have the day figured out, get away from them as fast as possible. They are one of the false prophets we are warned of. Large numbers of intelligent people have been fooled by those claiming to have figured out when Jesus is coming. Don’t be one of them.

When it comes down to it, the end times started when Jesus lived upon the earth the first time. In Luke 11:20, Jesus tells the religious leaders, “*But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*” There can be no doubt that our Lord cast out demons by the power of God, so the Kingdom of God had indeed come. The last days of this being satan’s kingdom had begun. The last days of this earth’s current history had begun. In fact in 1 John 2:18 the apostle John writes, “*Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.*” 2000 years ago, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, John was calling it the “last hour”.

But yes, there is a time coming when it will be, “The Last Days”. Here in Matthew 24, Jesus tells us what to look for. Now really, when we look at history, these things have been happening all along. There have been wars from the beginning. There have been famines and earthquakes. Mankind has been brutal to mankind. The thing to notice here is how Jesus describes them as birth pangs.

Some of us know much more than others what birth pangs are like. But we all get the idea. The birth pangs begin with some pain and they come with time in-between. Then, as the time for birth draws near, the pain increases in intensity and they happen much more frequently.

Jesus is letting us know that the wars and natural disasters and false teachers will take place more often and the devastation will intensify. As these things increase, so will lawlessness and persecution of Christians. Numbers of those who were associated with the church will fall away. Love will grow cold; people will lose the natural concern we have for each other; life will lose its preciousness.

Who can deny that these things are taking place? Yet, things can certainly get much worse. It is natural for us, as Christians, to especially take notice when Israel is involved, and rightfully so. While Jesus is the focal point of the whole Bible and the story of redemption, Israel is the physical focal point on earth. When something happens in Israel, we need to pay attention.

Well, what do we do regarding these things that Jesus tells us and the impending time of His second advent? While Jesus tells us that we don’t know the exact time of His return, He does tell us things to look for that indicate He is drawing near. He wants us to be aware that the end of history is approaching.

We don’t want to ignore the signs of His coming. In Matthew 16, Jesus chastises the religious leaders for not recognizing the signs of the times; in other words, that He fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah and he was standing right in front of them. We want to pay attention to the signs so that we are not caught unaware when things happen; like the attack on Israel. We are not to be dismissive of wars and natural disasters, they cause great human suffering and we should help if we can. But they are going to happen with increased frequency.

At the same time, we don’t let these things paralyze us. Jesus gives us encouragement in Luke 21:28, “*But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*.” In Christ we are justified. Throughout life we are sanctified; we become more like Christ. But we still fall into sin and we still face death. When Jesus comes back, we will be forever freed from these things; our redemption will be fulfilled.

Along with not being paralyzed, it is actually a call to action. We have work to do. As always, this work is not for our salvation because Jesus has already accomplished that. Our work is to follow the commands of Jesus out of love for God and to help others out of love for our neighbor. More than once, Jesus commends the servant who is busy at work when his Master returns. Let Jesus find each of us about our tasks when our beloved Master and Saviour comes for us.

Jesus tells us to persevere. We will not be immune to the effects of the birth pangs. Although God can and will keep His people from eternal destruction, we are promised tribulation while in this life. It may be physical problems and frustrations; it may be persecution simply for the name of Jesus. Either way, we must not turn from the One who was willing to suffer our deserved punishment in our place. If we persevere, we will enter into the glory of the presence Jesus.

And among these very important points is the command to not be deceived. Satan has been practicing deceiving people from the beginning of creation; he is good at it. The Bible is our weapon against deceit. Ephesians 6:17 tells us to take “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*.” We need to study our Bibles because it is the word of God and that is our weapon against being deceived.

If we know our Bibles, we will be protected from the false teachers who either twist or deny God’s word. We will also recognize the false Christs that Jesus warned about. Make no mistake, Jesus will not come back quietly as a baby or a prophet that appears out of nowhere. When Jesus comes back, it will be visible to all and it will be noisy. He will come in the clouds. He will be accompanied by the trumpet and the shout of the archangel. Don’t be deceived and persevere.

This current war in Israel may be the start of the very end of time; or it may be just another birth pang that is a harbinger of things to come. Our place is to watch and be aware; while doing the things that Jesus commanded: follow Him, tell others the Gospel, and trust the Father.

As this war continues for what is likely to be an extended time; keep in mind that satan is not only a murderer, he is a liar and an accuser. We will see these things regarding this war as time goes on. The atrocities against Israel will continue. Right now, most of the world is horrified and stands with Israel. It will be interesting to see how quickly many of them will turn; either spreading falsehood or denying Israel’s right to defend itself; or accuse Israel of being the aggressor and of war crimes.

Satan will bring all these things against them. While we must understand that Israel has become secular and we cannot simply support everything they do, we must also understand that they are God’s chosen people and He has special plans for them. That means we don’t turn against them and that we engage the enemy in prayer.

Please agree with me in prayer for Israel and all that is going on with God’s people.

All powerful God, we thankfully come to You as Your adopted children in Christ, asking for Your great mercy and help for Your children Israel. Once more, they are under attack by wicked men who are under the deceiving power of satan. Although they have again proved to be unfaithful, You are always faithful. Show Your faithfulness once more to the world by intervening on behalf of Israel.

Preserve that country Lord, miraculously born in a day according to Your word. According to Your promises, Israel will always have at least a remnant. We know that You will keep Your people, so we pray that this will be done soon; that this war will incur few casualties.

We lift up to You those who have been injured. We ask for Your healing touch upon them. We lift up to You the families of those who have lost loved ones. May they receive that peace that is beyond understanding. We pray for peace in Israel; we pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We pray that many will turn to Jesus Christ in faith because of what has happened.

We lift up to You the people who live in Gaza. These are people made in Your image who are now living in a war zone. We pray for their protection, healing and peace. May they come to see the light of Christ. There are many who do not agree with Hamas, there are even Christians who live there. Please give them guidance and direction to deal with what is coming.

And may You be glorified. May Your people be preserved in such a way the all the earth will know that You are God and that You are able to protect Your people. May Jesus be glorified as many turn to Him for salvation; proclaiming Him to be Lord and Master.

We pray in the blessed name of Jesus

Amen