

# A Signal and a Work

When giving the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus identified two defining events that must take place in the last days. The first will stand as a signal to His end-time church to prepare to go to a place He designates. The second represents a direct order from God to His servants regarding His work. First, let us examine the signal.

When speaking of the last days, Jesus indicated that an event referred to as the “abomination of desolation” would take place, and that when it did, God’s true church must be in flight to a place He has chosen. Notice what Jesus says.

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the house top not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. (Mt. 24:15-18)

This flight will begin with an evacuation of Jerusalem and its surrounding region. Shortly after this exodus, God will supernaturally lead His people to a place of protection where they will stay for 1260 days, or three and one half years (Rev. 12:6). This end-time exodus will be triggered by an event that was prophesied while Judah was in captivity over twenty five hundred years ago.

## **The Abomination of Desolation**

What is the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel the prophet? Most authorities believe this prophecy is dual in nature. In other words, it occurred in the past and will occur again in the future. The original abomination of desolation occurred in 167 B.C., when Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria profaned the temple by erecting in it a statue to Jupiter Olympus. He then sacrificed swine in the temple and made the practice of Judaism a capital offense. This event was prophesied by Daniel hundreds of years before it took place (Dan. 11:31).

But what is this future abomination of desolation referred to by Jesus? What event or events are to take place that will be a clear signal to God’s church to flee Judea? There are two events the scriptures strongly suggest constitute the abomination of desolation. The first involves military forces occupying the city of Jerusalem. This is supported by Jesus’ own words. When speaking of the end time, Jesus warned that the abomination of desolation would be preceded by armies.

And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. (Lk. 21:20-21)

The city of Jerusalem is the most contested place on earth. Today it is constantly in the cross hairs of warring factions fighting to possess it. Jerusalem is the most prominent city to both the Jewish and Christian people and, to a lesser extent, those who espouse the faith of Islam. It is interesting to note that although Jerusalem is mentioned prolifically throughout the Bible, it is never mentioned in the Koran. Despite this fact the faith of Islam regards this city as one of its three most holy sites.

Recently, the fighting over Jerusalem has intensified to such a level that a lasting peace in this area seems to be nothing more than an illusion. Despite all attempts by world leaders to reach a compromise that will bring some form of peace to the middle east, the violence continues and the death toll mounts.

Today, virtually all experts concede that the only hope for stability in this area is to dispatch an international peacekeeping force into the region. Many of these scenarios exclude the presence of the United States because of their close ties to Israel. Foreign armies in Jerusalem were once regarded as highly improbable. However, now it seems inevitable.

Jesus declared that once foreign armies encompass this great ancient city, His church must be ready to quickly flee to a place He has prepared. There are many who simply do not believe in a literal place of safety (Zeph. 2:3); however, the scriptures not only describe it but state that all Christians should pray that they will be included among those who go there (Lk. 21:36).

The second aspect of the abomination of desolation involves the presence of a world leader who will command the respect of all the major governments on earth. Some have suggested that the "beast" described in the book of Revelation will be invited to establish his headquarters in Jerusalem and perhaps even in a rebuilt temple. Others believe this person may be a great religious leader (the false prophet). The thirteenth chapter of Revelation strongly suggests that both of these men will present an image of great virtue, but in reality their authority and strength comes from none other than Satan the devil.

### **Preach the Gospel**

The second defining event that must take place in the last days involves a special mission God gives to His servants. When describing the time of the end, Jesus declared that a work would be done that was so important that without it the end would not come. Notice what Jesus said:

And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Mt. 24:14)

The gospel of the kingdom is something that links all the champions of the faith, from the Old Testament prophets to his end-time servants. It represents one of the great commissions Christ gave to His church, and make no mistake about it, Jesus practiced what he preached.

### **Jesus and the Gospel**

Two thousand years ago, when Jesus walked the countryside of Palestine, He preached a powerful message. It was a message about a kingdom – a kingdom that was going to come to this earth and a kingdom of which He would preside over as its Sovereign. Everything in His life was dedicated to advancing the cause of that kingdom; His birth, His teaching, His miracles, His parables, His life (both public and private) were all dedicated to advancing the cause of a kingdom He knew was going to come to this earth, and He knew He was going to bring it. He began His ministry proclaiming that message. The gospel of Mark indicates that when John the Baptist was cast into prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom and exhorting those who would hear to "repent."

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God... And saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel. (Mk. 1:14-15)

Notice what Jesus did not preach. He did not preach a prosperity gospel, a health-and-wealth gospel, a you-deserve-to-get-rich gospel, or a you-deserve-it-now gospel. He did not preach gospel music or a trucker's gospel or a biker's gospel or a butcher's, baker's or candlestick maker's gospel for that matter. Jesus spoke of a real kingdom. He described its laws, its citizens, its territory, and its leaders.

Today, the overwhelming majority of "Christian evangelists" have made a "freak show" out of the gospel. They prance around on the stages of great auditoriums. They sob openly during their messages. Their services are a perfectly choreographed theatrical presentation. Many beckon their audience to "come and experience God's healing power." Some shout, and their audience shout back. Others speak in "tongues" and almost all will claim, "We've got the devil on the run!" The truth is that God Almighty does not hear their words, but He does smell them, and their work is a stench. These self-proclaimed servants

of God are those who the scriptures say went forth but were not sent. The prophet Jeremiah called them “brutish” (Jer. 10:21), and their contribution to the cause of the kingdom is nil.

God’s word speaks prolifically about false ministers throughout the New Testament and warns every believer to beware of those who would subvert the truth. The apostle Paul repeatedly warned God’s church to beware of those preaching another Jesus (2Cor. 11:4). He actually pronounced to the churches in Galatia a curse on anyone who would preach another gospel (Gal. 1:8-9). Peter not only dealt with men who were willing to pay for the power of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:19-22), but warned in an epistle that “there shall be false teachers... who bring in damnable heresies” (2Pet. 2:1). The apostle John warned Christians to “try the spirits whether they are of God... because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1Jn 4:1). See also Jude 3-4.

### **A Serious Message**

When Jesus’ apostles went forth to preach the gospel, it was not a circus atmosphere. Their approach was not to put on a big show. These founding fathers of the New Testament church gave their lives to proclaiming a truth that was anything but frivolous. They were serious men living in serious times, proclaiming a serious message. That message was a warning that God’s law is real and there are real consequences for breaking it. The gospel of the kingdom is an announcement that the government of God is going to be established on this earth under the direct supervision of Jesus Christ (Rev. 11:15) and His saints (Dan. 7:18, 21). It is a declaration that Jesus Christ will return to this world in great power and subdue the nations. At that time, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) will come as a the commander of a great army (Rev. 19:11-21). But before He returns, a warning message will be proclaimed.

### **The Gospel as a Witness**

When Jesus spoke of the last days, He stated that the gospel would be preached as a “witness” (Mt. 24:14). The word “witness” in this verse is very interesting and reveals a profound truth concerning God’s end-time church. This term comes from the Greek word “marturion.” It is a term that pertains to a judicial proceeding. “Marturion” is testimony based on evidence; in this case the Decalogue or Ten Commandments. When Jesus uttered this word He was using it in a prosecutorial context. Here God’s law is held up as the standard, and mankind is indicted for its defiance.

The scriptures make it absolutely clear that God’s end-time church is the instrument He uses to show His people their sins and exhort them to repent. When speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God commissions His servants to powerfully proclaim this witness. Notice what God says. Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. (Isa. 58:1)

Isaiah is not the only one God uses to exhort His servants to proclaim a warning message. The second chapter of the book of Joel describes the very last days of man’s reign on the earth. At that time an invincible army will rout the armies of this world and seize control of the planet. However, before this takes place, God directs His servants to proclaim a warning.

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand... (Joel 2:1).

### **A Warning to His Watchmen**

So important is the proclaiming of the gospel as a witness that God specifically stated He would hold His servants personally responsible if they failed in this charge. Using the prophet Ezekiel, God warned that although destruction will come upon those who refuse to heed His word, a warning message would be delivered. If His servants failed to issue that warning, the blood of those destroyed would be on their hands. Notice what God says.

Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. (Ezk. 33:1-5)

## But what if the Watchman Doesn't Warn?

But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. (Ezk. 33:6-9)

Here God uses the strongest of words when instructing His servants regarding their responsibility to preach the gospel as a witness. In short, God is saying "IT IS YOUR DUTY! And you will be judged according to how you carry that duty out."

This is not the only time God used Ezekiel to warn His servants concerning the great responsibility they have as watchmen. In an earlier chapter, Ezekiel recorded the following:

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou give him not warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, when a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul. (Ezk. 3:18-21)

Some have suggested that the words of Ezekiel pertain to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and do not represent an end-time prophecy. But this could not possibly be true. Ezekiel's warning was written over one hundred years after Israel had been routed by Assyria and led away captive. This being the case, there is only one possibility concerning Ezekiel's writing. It was a warning of a future captivity. One that will come upon prophetic Israel in the last days. And God's instructions are to His "watchmen" living at that time.