

The Sign of His Coming
Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-27

Introduction

Deception, deceit, falsehood, lying, fraud, and apostates, false prophets, false teachers, heretics, anti-Christ. What do all these things have in common? The first five are used by the last five to persuade those who seek to follow Jesus Christ to follow them or their teaching instead. Those who hate Jesus have always and will always use any means possible to lead those who profess faith in Christ astray. Those who have abandoned Jesus or try to ignore Him will do the same in order to justify themselves. As the culmination of the ages draws closer, the danger of this continues to increase, and during the period that we often refer to as the Great Tribulation, the Time of Jacob's Troubles, or Daniel's 70th week, the deception of such wicked people will reach its peak. I mentioned two weeks ago that prior to the Abomination of Desolation which happens at the mid-point of that period, Matthew 24:11 states, *"Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many."* After the Abomination of Desolation, Matthew 24:24 warns, *"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect."* I want to expand on that this morning.

False Teachers & Apostates

Apostates have been around since the beginning of human history. Cain was the first apostate. God accepted Abel's offering of the firstlings of his flock, but God rejected Cain's offering. Since Cain was a tiller of the ground, he may have offered the things he had grown, but the example God had set Himself was an animal sacrifice, and God had already shown regard for Abel's animal sacrifice. Cain should have changed what he was doing to give to God an acceptable offering, but instead, Cain became very angry. He wanted to set the terms by which God would accept him instead of meeting the terms God had set. God warned him, but Cain, out of his jealousy, committed the first murder. Adam's first son killed the second son and the human race has not improved any since.

Man still wants to set the standards to gain God's approval instead of meeting the standards God has set. False prophets and teachers feed that lie to lead people astray. Deceptive false prophets existed all throughout Israel's history. God warned the nation about them in Deuteronomy 18 and how to distinguish true prophets from false ones, yet Israel's history is filled with examples of them following after the false teachers anyway.

False teachers existed from the earliest church history too. The church was only a year or so old when Acts 8 records that Simon seeks to purchase the ability to distribute the Holy Spirit. He is sternly warned by Peter, but history records that he later became known as Simon the Sorcerer and was an apostate. Our word simony, the buying and selling of ecclesiastical privileges, comes from him.

The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian Elders to *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"* (Acts 20:28-29).

Peter warned a few years later in his second letter that just as there were false prophets in Israel, *"there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. and many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words . . ."* (2 Peter 2:1-3).

The Apostle John is stronger in his warning to the Ephesian church about forty years after Paul had warned them of “*savage wolves*” that would arise from among them. John calls them “*anti-Christ*s” writing in 1 John 2:18-19, “*Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they are not of us.*”

Things have not changed. The same is still true today. There are still many false teachers and “*antichrists*” around. Their writings can easily be found in any book store or the internet. Many have media presentations posted on the internet and broadcast on radio and television. Materials on false religions abound. There is a plethora of materials on the New Age movement, which is generally just Americanized versions of Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern Religions, while there are also blends of Eastern and Christian thought or other amalgamations of various religions.

Christian cults are also very busy in promoting their lies. Their teachings range from the bizarre to distortions of Biblical theology, but all cults include heresies of various types. Most often these are distortions or denials of the nature and relationship of the Godhead. Some teach that God changes back and forth from Father, Son and Holy Spirit as needed. This is called Modalism or Sabellianism. One divine being existing in three different modes. “The Local Church,” founded by Witness Lee, espouses a form of this ancient heresy.

Others teach some form of Unitarianism in which the triune nature of God is denied. Usually the deity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are denied with the Holy Spirit presented as a manifestation of God and with Jesus presented as an ordinary man filled in some way by God. There are various forms of this heresy. In some Unitarian groups rationalism has replaced all supernaturalism with the result that God to them is a mere figure head for their form of humanism. Others, such as The Way International and the Jehovah Witnesses, deny the deity of Christ and the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit. For them, Jesus is not God incarnate, but human flesh filled with God, and the Holy Spirit is God’s spirit force.

The Mormons teach that Jesus is the son of Elohim and the brother of Lucifer (the devil). But then, they also teach that you are also a child of Elohim, and if you follow their teachings, then some day you will also become a glorified, exalted being like him and have your own planet where you will be its god and you and your wife/wives will continually be giving birth to new souls to populate that planet. The Mormons are actually polytheistic in believing in many gods rather than monotheistic.

Yet the Mormon idea is not that far from what is taught by “Christian” radio and TV preachers who advocate what is called the “*little gods*” doctrine. For example, Earl Paulk writes in his book, Satan Unmasked, “*Adam and Eve were placed in the world as the seed and expression of God. Just as dogs have puppies and cats have kittens, so God has little gods . . .*” He continues, “*Until we comprehend that we are little gods and we begin to act like little gods, we cannot manifest the Kingdom of God.*”

This has also been taught by Robert Tilton, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland and their disciples. Copeland wrote in his book, The Power of the Tongue, “*man had total authority to rule as a god over every living creature on earth, and he was to rule by speaking words. His words would carry the power and anointing of God that was in him from the time he was first created.*” Copeland said in his sermon entitled, The Force of Love, “*You don’t have a god in you, you are one!*” Kenneth Hagin has taught that the Christian “*is as much an incarnation [of God] as is Jesus of Nazareth.*” Paul Crouch of TBN fell into this heresy as well. The late Walter Martin reported speaking with him on this issue for two hours with Paul Crouch defending this doctrine the whole time.

Casey Treat, pastor of Christian Faith Center in Seattle has taught that Christians are “*exact duplicates of god.*” In one sermon, after he gets the congregation to repeat this blasphemy out loud, he goes on to say, “*When God looks in the mirror, He sees me! When I look in the mirror, I see God! Oh, Hallelujah! . . .*” He continued, “*You know, sometimes people say to me, when they’re mad and want to*

put me down . . . 'You just think you're a little god! Thank you! Hallelujah! You got that right! 'Who d'you think you are, Jesus?' Yep!'"

With this sort of thinking going on in supposedly Christian churches and being preached on so called "Christian" TV and radio programs, those who claim to be Christ are not so far fetched. Rev. Sun Myung Moon denies the deity of Jesus and says he failed to complete work of redemption so God sent him as a second Messiah to complete the work. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that Wikipedia has a list of 11 people currently alive that claim to be Christ.

False teachers, false prophets, apostates, heretics, anti-Christians have been around from soon after the beginning and they are still around. It will only get worse as we get closer to the time of Jacob's Troubles, and it will reach its peak during the period of the Great Tribulation. But what is the set up for professing Christians to be deceived and led into such apostasy?

Paul addresses this in both of his letters to Timothy. In 1 Timothy 4:1-5 he states, *"¹ But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³ men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; ⁵ for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer."*

To summarize, this parallels the heresy of the Judaizers who substituted ascetic legalism for true spirituality. Religious dietary restrictions are often part of cult teachings and practices with many of them appealing to the Levitical codes. Many in what is now being called the Hebrew Roots movement include elements of this. Calling attention to the fact that Christianity has risen from Judaism or can even be properly called a sect of Judaism is good. Requiring adherence to Levitical dietary restrictions is bad and the doctrine of demons as Paul points out here.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-4 Paul solemnly charges Timothy to *"² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."*

This has happened a lot over the last century, and it is picking up speed. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, the modernists cast aside the Bible as the source of truth in favor of literary theories and the desire to be relevant. By mid-century, the neo-evangelicals were trying to find ways to be considered less hostile than the fundamentalists and more thoughtful and intellectual. It is commendable that they wanted to dialogue with theological liberals in an effort to win them back, but they were the ones who became influenced which led to the compromise of Biblical doctrine in favor of the wisdom of men. Along with the church growth movement of the late 1900's came the quest to be seeker sensitive resulting in the gospel being either diminished or even perverted in order to attract unbelievers and then avoid offending them. As society shifted into the post-modern era in the early 2000's, the pursuit of cultural relevance by some churches moved them into the Emergent movement, and with it they lost the ability to discern truth and error. At present, there appears to be a strong movement within what used to be conservative Christianity which is "woke" to "social justice." The Southern Baptists are battling in this area of danger at present. The desire again seems to be a quest for cultural relevance, but as MacArthur and others have warned, it is leading to a compromise of the gospel once again. The reality is that the true church is only culturally relevant when it proclaims without compromise the gospel and the truth of God's word so that it changes culture. No Christian can remain faithful to God when seeking the acceptance and approval of those who reject the Bible as the standard of truth. If you do not know or are not committed to learning the Scriptures, you will be led astray by errant and heretical teachers.

What is bad now and getting worse in professing Christians wanting their ears tickled while seeking the approval of the world will become extreme when the 70th week revealed by the angel Gabriel to Daniel begins and true Christians are removed leaving an apostate church. Jesus' warnings in Matthew 24 about this has application now and in the future. We who live in the present should not be led astray by the false teachers of our times, and those who enter into the tribulation period should not be taken in by the claims of the false Christs and false prophets that will arise and claim that Christ has come. Jesus will not return in secret or any hidden manner. He said *"For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be."* When Jesus returns, it will be noticed by everyone. Revelation 1:7 even states that *"every eye will see Him."*

Signs Before the Coming of the Son of Man - Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24–25; Luke 21:25-26

Despite what Jesus has taught on this subject, there have always been those that cast doubt on the manner of Jesus' return or even His return at all and caused many in the church to be greatly disturbed. Paul wrote the book of 2 Thessalonians to correct this problem. What he writes also corrects those today who cause similar problems.

The Thessalonians were enduring persecution for being Christians at that time. Paul sought to comfort them that the Lord was coming back and would deal out retribution to those who do not know God and to those that do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus (1:8). Someone had been teaching that the day of the Lord had already come (2:2) and Paul assures them that it had not and would not until certain events took place including the presence of the anti-Christ and the great deceptions of that time. He writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, *"⁹ that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness."* In other words, if what happens before Jesus' returns is not present, then you can be assured that Jesus has not yet returned.

Paul's statement in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 that *"the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night"* might confuse people who do not pay attention to context, but that is not a reference to Jesus returning in a hidden manner. It is a reference to the sudden and unexpected nature of His return as pointed out in the very next verse, *"While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape."* Every woman here who has born a child knows that labor pains come suddenly and everyone knows it when they come - right dads!

We saw in our study last week that Jesus points out the events leading up to His physical return will increase in pace and intensity like labor pains, and that when He comes, everyone will know it. It will not be hidden! Anyone that claims that Jesus has or will return in some secret form is a heretic, a false teacher!

In Matthew 24:29 Jesus continues to outline the great signs that will occur just prior to His return. *"²⁹ But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Luke 21:25-26 adds that along with the signs in the heavens, "on the earth dismay among the nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the earth."*

There are many references to these various signs in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures including Isaiah 13, Joel 2, Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, Revelation 6 & 8. While it is hard to coordinate the exact time sequence within all the references because some of these phenomena will occur more than once, it is important to know that these things will occur and they will herald Jesus' return. The general time sequence here are the events of the *"beginning of birth pangs"* in Matthew 24:5-14, the

abomination of desolation being set up (Matthew 24:15) followed by great tribulation (Matthew 24:21) and then the signs that occur in the sky including the darkened Sun and Moon along with the stars falling (Matthew 24:29) along with the perplexity of men at the roaring of the sea and the waves (Luke 21:25-26). It is after all these events that the sign of the return of the Son of Man is given. And what is that sign?

The Sign of Coming of the Son of Man - Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27

Matthew 24:30, ³⁰ *and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.*

Jesus will appear in the clouds of the sky with power and great glory just as prophesied. Acts 1:9-11 records what happened at Jesus' ascension. ⁹ *“And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. ¹¹ They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”* Jesus left in a cloud, so He will return in a cloud.

Revelation 1:7 states, *“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”* Again, the prophecy is that Jesus Christ will return with the clouds. Coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory is the sign of His return. This will be the sight that Daniel saw in his vision recorded in Daniel 7:13-14, *“I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. ¹⁴ “And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.”* There is nothing hidden about it. It will be plain to everyone, and so much so that they will mourn over their sin for they will realize that judgment is now upon them.

Jesus began this discourse by saying, *“Do not be misled,”* and indeed no one should be misled by either present or future claims of Christ's return. When He returns, it will be obvious.

We should also not be misled about any of the other plain teachings of the Bible simply because God has already told us. People fall for the lies of false teachers for two basic reasons. First, they do not know what God has revealed in the Bible and are not willing to put the time and effort into finding out. Second, they like the lies and prefer them over the truth. Do not be like them. Take heed to pursue truth and wisdom to avoid foolishness and its consequences.

Gathering the Elect - Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27; Luke 21:28

Jesus finishes this section by revealing what will happen after He returns. He then teaches the meaning and application of what He revealed.

Matthew 24:31; *“And he will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”* Mark 13:27 adds this gathering will be *“from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.”* The angels will go throughout the earth to separate the elect from the unrighteous. Jesus will expand on this in Matthew 25 in explaining the sheep and goat judgment that follows His return.

There is hope in all of this for the elect who endured through the Tribulation period, which is why Luke 21:28 adds, *“But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”* Jesus will put an end to the reign of evil that has been on the earth.

Revelation 19:7-10 records John's vision of the marriage supper of the lamb in heaven. This is then followed in verses 11-21 by his vision of the return of Christ to earth to judge and wage war. To summarize this section, Jesus is riding a white horse wearing a robe dipped in blood. On it is written, *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*. He is also called *Faithful and True* and *The Word of God*. Along with Him are the armies of heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, and they are also riding white horses. He smites the nations and treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, calling upon the birds to gather to eat the flesh of His enemies. The beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assemble to make war upon Him, but they are conquered and killed with the beast and the false prophet thrown alive in the lake of fire which burns forever.

This will be the return of Messiah, the conquering king whose eyes are a flame of fire. He will vanquish all His enemies and establish His kingdom as David's greater son. This was the promise of the Hebrew prophets.

We will see this in more detail when we get to the end of Matthew 25, but in brief, there are two gatherings that take place after Jesus returns on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. The exact sequence is an educated guess since no single passage gives such detail, but in piecing passages together, the following is reasonable.

Jesus appears in the clouds along with His army which is made up of the saints who will already be in heaven (Revelation 19:11-18). Zechariah 14 describes the Lord's return to fight against the nations that oppose Him and standing on the Mount of Olives with it splitting in the middle from east to west. Jesus conquers His foes and throws the Beast and the false prophet into the eternal lake of fire. The angels are sent throughout the earth and they gather the elect (Revelation 19:19-21), and according to both the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:37-43) and the parable of the dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50), angels also gather the stumbling blocks, those who commit lawlessness and the wicked who will be cast into the furnace of fire. This agrees with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:31-46 about the judgment of the sheep and the goats. The goats, the unrighteous, are sent away into eternal punishment while the sheep, the righteous, inherit the kingdom and eternal life. Jesus' reign begins with only righteous people inhabiting the earth since all the unrighteous will have been removed.

The promise of the return of Jesus Christ should put fear into the unrighteous to repent and be reconciled with God before it is too late. That same promise is the hope of the Christian and motivation to live righteously in the present, for all that this world has to offer is nothing compared to eternity with our Savior.

Introduction

A continued increase in false teachers and apostasy can be _____ as the future unfolds

False Teachers & Apostates

Cain wanted to do things _____, refused God's warning, and murdered Abel out of jealousy

False teachers feed the _____ people have to set their own standards of righteousness

God warned Israel about future _____ prophets in Deuteronomy 18

False teachers arose _____ in church history - Acts 8; Acts 20:28-29, 2 Peter 2:1-3

1 John 3:18-19 - _____ - what was true then is still true today

Materials on false religions _____ and are readily available

All Christian cults include heresies of various sorts: _____ in *The Local Church*.

_____ in *The Way International* and *Jehovah's Witnesses*. _____ in the *Mormons*

The "_____" doctrine - Earl Paulk, Robert Tilton, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Casey Treat, etc.

_____ Christs - Rev. Sun Myung Moon, etc. (Wikipedia lists 11 currently alive claiming to be Christ)

1 Timothy 4:1-5 - substituting ascetic _____ for true spirituality is the doctrine of demons

2 Timothy 4:1-4 - Over the last century many movements have turned from sound doctrine to _____ teachers

Modernists → neo-evangelicals → seeker sensitive → emergent → "social justice"

The church is only culturally relevant when it proclaims the _____ of God's word so that it changes culture

Jesus' warnings apply to today and the future - heeding God's word _____ deception from false teachers

Jesus will return in a manner to be seen by _____ - Matthew 24:27; Revelation 1:7

Signs Before the Coming of the Son of Man - Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25-26

2 Thess. 2 - Paul counteracts claims Christ has come by pointing out antichrist and apostasy will come _____

1 Thess. 5:2-3 - Jesus will return as a "thief in the night" - _____, but well known to everyone one

Before Jesus returns, there will be _____ signs in the sky - Matt. 24; Luke 21; Isaiah 13; Joel 2; Rev. 6 & 8

The signs _____ Jesus' return - "birth pangs" → Abomination of Desolation → unmistakable celestial signs

The Sign of Coming of the Son of Man - Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27

Acts 1:9-11 - Jesus left in a _____, so He will return in a cloud

Revelation 1:7 _____ the vision in Daniel 7:13-14

There is nothing hidden about Jesus' return - _____

Gathering the Elect - Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:17; Luke 21:28

The _____ will separate out the elect from the unrighteous - Matthew 25 will expand on what happens

Luke 21:28 - the signs of Jesus' return signify redemption is near to the elect going through the _____

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-10) is followed by the Lord's return to _____ (11-21)

The Messiah returns as victorious king to _____ His enemies and set up His kingdom

Both the elect and the unrighteous are gathered for the sheep and goat _____ (Matt. 13:50; 25:31-46)

The promise of Jesus' return should cause the unrighteous to fear and _____ to be reconciled with God

The hope of Jesus' return is _____ for the Christian to live righteously

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch.

Older Children - Do one or more of the following: 1) Count how many times references are made false teachers 2) Discuss with your parents how to protect yourself from false teachers and their doctrine.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. Why do those who hate Jesus try to lead astray those who profess faith in Him? What theological problem was underlying Cain's murder of Abel? Why is man resistive to following God's requirements for righteousness? What false teachers arise in the book of Acts? How many epistles include warnings about false teachers? Give examples of the warnings given? Do false teachers exist today? Give examples. What are some of the more common heresies among the cults concerning Christ? Who is Jesus according to the Jehovah's Witnesses? According to the Mormons? To those who teach the "little gods" doctrine? Why would people believe the claims of those who claim to be Christ today? Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Summarize the problem and give an example of a modern teacher / Christian cult that does this? Read 1 Timothy 4:1-4. What movements in the Twentieth Century demonstrated this danger? What movements in the this century have "tickled the ears" of those that will not endure sound doctrine? What can be expected in the near future? What will happen during the Tribulation period? What specific signs will occur before Jesus returns? Why can you unhesitantly call those who claim Jesus has returned secretly to be heretics? What is the sign of Jesus' return? How will He return? Who will see Him when He returns? Compare Acts 1:9-11; Revelation 1:7 and Daniel 7:13-14. What do all three have in common? What differences are there? What is the simple solution to prevent being lead astray by false teachers? Why do the signs of Jesus coming bring hope to the elect that go through the Tribulation? Where does the Marriage Supper of the Lamb take place (Revelation 19:7-10). What follows this event? What names are given to Jesus when He returns? What is the manner of His return? Who comes with Him? Examine the parable of the sower and the dragnet in Matthew 13. Who do the angels gather in both of them and for what purpose? Who do the angels gather in Matthew 24:31? What happens to both groups in Matthew 25:31-46? What should be the reaction of the unrighteous be to the promise of Jesus' return? What should be the reaction of the righteous? What is your reaction?