

Israel – The Focus of the Last Days
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Today is the last sermon in our series called Signs of the Times. People in the Bible wanted to know the signs of the end time and people today want to know the same thing. No one knows the exact date the world will end, but the Bible gives us some signs of what the end times will look like.

We have preached for weeks on the signs that Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24: deception, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famine, pestilence, disasters, increase in wickedness and lawlessness, people falling away from faith and the gospel being preached to the whole world.

There are other signs of the times in the Bible – one which we’ve seen in the news a lot lately. Today I’m preaching on Israel – Focus of the Last Days.

You might miss this when Jesus talked about it in Matthew 24:32-33 because it is in the form of a parable.

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

Why did Jesus associate a fig tree with the end time signs? Some argue that Jesus was just using a simple horticultural observation. Quite simply – the fig tree is one of the last trees to bud in the spring and so when it’s leaves are budding we know that summer is just around the corner! So, they argue, Jesus was simply saying; “when the fig tree buds you know that summer is near – likewise, when you see all these things happening, know that the end is near”.

On the other hand, Jesus used the concept of a parable, implying that underneath He was teaching a deep truth. It seems like Jesus is just comparing the signs of the end times to signs in nature. But the Bible often refers to Israel as a fig tree. For example: In Hosea 9:10 God said:

When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season.

Jeremiah 24:5-7 says:

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: “Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians.

My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them.

I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. They will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with all their heart."

So, when Jesus spoke of the new shoots on the fig tree as signaling that summer is near, He was actually alluding to the restoration of Israel and His second coming. He was saying that when we see Israel regathered in her own land and 'budding like a fig tree' then His return is near – even 'at the doors'.

Listen closely: if you want to understand the events of the world and God's timeline for restoration, then look at Israel. Just as Jesus said, "... you will know it is near—at the doors!"

For most of history since the time of Christ, Christians believed they were the generation to see His second coming. But that was impossible because there was no Jewish state in Israel.

Have you ever noticed how almost every day the focus of the world's attention is on a small country of 8.8 million people in the Middle East? There are many other countries in the world and many other conflicts in the world. But the focus is always on Israel. Why is the focus on this nation that is about the size of New Jersey? Texas is 33 times bigger than Israel!

The world's attention is directed to this tiny nation for one important reason: Israel will play a key role in the return of Christ. So this is a sign of the times we cannot ignore. We all need a biblical view of Israel. We cannot have the world's view or the Palestinian view or even the Zionist view – we need God's view!

Israel is the center of world events in the last days. Of all the cities in the world, Jerusalem is the city to watch. Why is that? Because the Jewish people were chosen by God – Israel is the Holy Land and Israel is the focus of prophecies about the end times.

1- God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham

The book of Genesis devotes only two chapters to the story of creation. One chapter covers the fall of man. Eight chapters cover the thousands of years from creation to the time of Abram. But 38 chapters deal with the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the fathers of Israel and the Jewish race. In Genesis 12:1-3

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

History has proven beyond reasonable doubt that the nations that have blessed the Jewish people have had the blessing of God; the nations that have cursed the Jewish people have experienced the curse of God.

Why did God choose Abraham and Israel? All we know is that it was His sovereign will. Deuteronomy 7:6-7 says about the Jewish people:

The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession. The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

God's ways are not our ways.
 He chooses the small to confound the great.
 He chooses the foolish to confound the wise.
 He chooses the weak to confound the strong.
 He chooses the few to confound the many.
 He chooses the poor to confound the rich.

Why does He do that? So it is obvious that the wisdom is God's – the power is God's – the riches are God's. All glory belongs to Him and Him alone.

God said this in the covenant He made with Abraham - Genesis 17:7-8

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.

As part of this covenant, God said He gave Israel to the Jews forever. No matter what you hear about the land belonging to the Palestinians, God says it belongs to the Jews forever!

However – God conditioned this upon their obedience to Him. When the Children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land – Moses warned them about this in Deuteronomy 4 when he told them not to do evil in God's sight. He said in verses 26-27, if you do:

You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the Lord will drive you.

Sure enough – they turned from God and once again God's prophetic word proved true. Jews were scattered among the nations.

2- Jesus said the Jews would lose their land and then get it back

Jesus predicted the destruction of Israel in Matthew 24 – which took place 40 years after His prophecy. Jesus also said this in Luke 21:23-24

There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Jesus said Jerusalem would be trampled on until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled. The Jewish people lost their homeland in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple and drove most of the Jews out of Israel.

And Jerusalem was indeed ruled by Gentiles for centuries – including Roman and British and Muslim control until the 6-Day War in 1967. For 2000 years the Jews were spread out across the globe and Jerusalem was under Gentile control.

By the way – this is what the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is all about. The Palestinians were the people who occupied the land of Palestine while the Jewish people were scattered. They claim ownership of the land of Israel and they want the land back!

Israel is surrounded by nations who hate them and the Bible teaches that one day Russia and the nations who hate Israel will come against them in a great battle. But Jesus said there would come a time when the times of the Gentiles ruling Jerusalem would end. And that did indeed happen!

And God always said that He would gather the scattered Jewish people back to the land of Israel again. There are so many biblical prophecies about this that I could take most of the day reading them. Here are a few: Ezekiel 36:24 says:

For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.

Deuteronomy 30:3-5 says:

The Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where He scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

Amos 9:14-15 says:

“I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them,” says the Lord your God.

God said He would bring the exiled, scattered Jewish people back to Israel again – and that they would never be uprooted again.

Let me just say this – in the history of the world, this has never happened before. No people group that has been driven from their country and decimated by the millions have survived and returned to their land after thousands of years! Have you ever met a Hittite or Ammonite or Edomite? No! Those ancient people groups disappeared from the earth! But I bet you know an Israelite! Because God spared the Jews and brought them back to their homeland.

That day was May 14, 1948 – a pivotal day in human history and in Bible prophecy. For on that day the nation of Israel was reestablished – fulfilling a 2500-year-old Bible prophecy.

3- The Bible commands us to support Israel

Psalm 122:6 says:

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you.

The scriptural principle of prosperity is tied to blessing Israel and the city of Jerusalem. I believe that one of the reasons America has been so blessed is because we have always supported Israel. That's why one of my most frequent prayers for every President and the US government is that they continue to be a strong ally and supporter of Israel. I want America to be blessed, not cursed. That's why we regularly pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

That's why we bless Israel and give to organizations that bless Israel – like Jewish Partnership Initiative - a ministry exists to raise up leaders and plant Messianic Jewish congregations around the world.

We support Israel because other nations were created by an act of men, but Israel was created by an act of God! Not only was Israel created by an act of God, Israel is sustained every single day by an act of God. Israel's very existence is obviously supernatural. They are a small nation and they are surrounded by rich, powerful nations dedicated to their destruction - yet they stand strong.

If America wants the blessing of God, we must continue to stand by Israel. That does not mean we support everything they do, but we do support them as an ally. If we as a church and you as an individual want the blessing of God, we must continue to stand by Israel.

I want to close by telling you the stories of two men named Harry Truman. One was the 33rd president of the United States. He was the man who ended World War 2 by making the incredibly difficult decision to drop 2 atomic bombs on Japan.

But one of the greatest things he accomplished was to help Israel regain her statehood.

On May 14, 1948 President Harry Truman announced that the United States would give official recognition to the new State of Israel.

Truman's decision to recognize Israel was one of the most difficult decisions of his Presidency. Many on his staff and in his Cabinet argued against recognition, in part because it would anger the surrounding Arab nations.

But in the end, against incredible opposition, President Harry Truman decided to recognize Israel to provide for a Jewish homeland. God had the right man in the right place at the right time because Harry Truman was a believer and a student of the Bible since his youth. From his understanding of the Old Testament, President Truman believed that the Jewish people had a God-given historical right to Palestine. He even cited Bible verses like Deuteronomy 1:8:

Behold, I have given up the land before you; go in and take possession of the land which the Lord hath sworn unto your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Thank God for President Harry Truman.

Now – let me tell you about a different man named Harry Truman. In May of 1980, geologists sent out warnings that Mt. Saint Helens in the state of Washington was about to have a volcanic eruption.

People were told to pack up and move out of the danger zone, but one man, named Harry Truman refused to leave. Harry had run the Mt. St. Helens Lodge for decades and he would not leave it – even though authorities and neighbors begged him to leave.

Many warnings were given - but Harry ignored the warnings. And at 8:31 AM on May 18, 1980 - the mountain exploded. This was the deadliest, most destructive and costliest volcano in American history.

Over 1300 feet from the top of that mountain came down in a huge avalanche of heat, gases, lava and rock traveling faster than the speed of sound. That avalanche flattened Harry Truman and everything else for 150 square miles. There were signs that something was going to happen but Harry ignored the warnings and he paid a price for ignoring the warnings.

Harry Truman was of the opinion that the danger from the volcano was exaggerated. But Harry Truman was wrong... dead wrong! Harry Truman, his 16 cats and Mt. Saint Helen's Lodge are all buried under 140 feet of debris and 90 feet of water.

Many people today are doing the same thing when it comes to God's warnings about the end.

They say things like-

I don't believe it will happen. Or-

Me and the man upstairs are OK. Or-
That's too far off, it won't affect me.

Really? Are you sure?

God has given us warnings in His Word.

God is warning all of us through the signs of the times.

God is warning us through what is happening in Israel.

But in addition to looking at the signs of the times – there is something I want you to look at even more: the sign of the cross! Hebrew 12:1-2 says:

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.

There are tough times coming and I want you to have tough faith so you can run with endurance. Yes, I want you to know the signs of the times, but even more - I want you to know Jesus and the power of the cross.

No matter what you are going through – the cross is the answer!
That's where Jesus shed His blood - and there is power in the blood!

The cross is that place where our enemy was defeated and the cross is the place where our sins are forgiven.

We're not forgiven because we deserve it!

We are forgiven because we look to Jesus and the blood He shed on the cross!

When you've sinned – the way to forgiveness is by looking at the cross!

When you're sick – the way to healing is by looking at the cross!

When you're grieving – the way to comfort is by looking at the cross!

When you're fighting a spiritual battle, the way to victory is looking at the cross.
That's where Jesus defeated and disarmed Satan.

The Bible says that every sin you ever committed was written down and nailed to that cross!

That's where the price was paid! That's where the victory was won!

That's where Jesus redeemed you – bought you back – from sin.

That's where His death bought you eternal life!

He took on your sin so you could become righteous!

He took on your sickness so you could be healed.

He carried your griefs and sorrow so you could be comforted!

So - look to the cross!

Look to Jesus – He is the author and finisher of your faith!

He started something good in you and He who began a good work in you will complete it!