

The End Times Signs in the Sky and Christian Persecution

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By [Nathan Jones](#)

Vic Batista: We are going to talk about the signs of the end times as we look at Luke 21:12. We'll talk in particular about the end times sign of great signs from the sky and the sign of Christian persecution.

Before we get into that sign, I want to say that I really enjoyed the Lamb & Lion Ministries Bible prophecy conference where you gave a presentation on the end times sign of technology. You and I are two techno geeks, right, Nathan, so we go hand in hand.

Nathan Jones: Yes, well, any new method to share the Gospel is important to use. I believe one of the greatest signs of the end times is the dramatic increase in technology. We can read in Daniel 12:4 how in the end times knowledge and travel will increase greatly, along with our ability to communicate. We live in a time period unlike anything ever experienced in human history. We can share the Gospel over the airways via TV, radio, podcast, cellphones, mobile devices — you name it. God has given us all these different avenues to share the Gospel. It's wonderful to be able to use them to reach people for Christ.

Vic Batista: I'm just as excited because I too believe that Jesus is coming back soon. And, since Jesus Christ is coming soon, be open to new avenues that reach people where they are at.

The Three Questions

Vic Batista: It's an incredible journey to read through Luke 21 and its parallel chapters Mark 13 and Matthew 24. Jesus was talking to us about the signs of the end times. Ten signs Jesus had been concentrating on explaining. Among those ten signs, Jesus tells us that there will be fearful signs in the sky. Please give us some info regarding the seventh of the ten signs — the signs in the skies. Then we'll jump into the eighth sign concerning Christian persecution.

Nathan Jones: In those chapters, Jesus was answering the questions that the Apostles had asked Him. The Apostles at the time had been looking at the Temple there in Jerusalem. It was the most magnificence building they'd ever seen. They were just gawking at it, but then Jesus announces, "This whole thing will be destroyed. Not one stone will be left upon another." The Apostles are like, "What?!?" They were so tongue-tied that it took them a travel across the valley from Jerusalem before they finally had the courage to ask Jesus what He meant.

The Apostles ended up asking Jesus three questions:

1. When would the Temple fall?
2. What would be the signs of the end of the age?
3. What will be the sign of Jesus' coming?

First, we know from history that the Temple fell in 70 AD.

Second, we know that the terminology for the signs of the end of the age mark the end of the Church Age. That's the age we are living in right now. It will end when Jesus comes and raptures the Church up to Heaven.

Then third, the Apostles wanted to know what signs to be looking out for that mark Jesus' Second Coming. The Second Coming happens at the end of a seven year Tribulation period that will befall the whole earth.

When Jesus gave us the answer to these three questions, He gave us signs. He gave ten of them that cover each of these three questions. The chapters point out that the frequency and intensity of these signs increases the closer we get to each event. Signs are given to answer each of these three questions. The signs came more frequent and intense before the Temple fell in 70 AD. They are even more frequent and more intense before the end of this Church Age. And, by the time Jesus' comes at the Second Coming, the signs will be just screaming in people's ears every single day.

End Times Signs #1-6

Vic Batista: That's why as we look here at Luke 21 we can see so clearly what the Bible tells us regarding these signs. Luke 21:11 reveals, "*And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.*"

Nathan Jones: To quickly re-cap the previous signs. Jesus gave ten signs, such as the first sign of the False Messiahs and False Christs who would be coming at the end of this age. There would be wars and rumors of wars, which is the second sign, that would also increase in frequency and intensity. The third sign concerns earthquakes in that how earthquakes would become more frequent and more intense and hit more powerfully as they came upon the earth.

The fourth sign concerns famine. Famines would be increasing in frequency and intensity, and especially during the Tribulation time period.

The fifth sign Jesus gave us was pestilence, which is plagues, diseases and sicknesses. Then there's the sixth sign which is fearful events both social and economic, and we certainly live in times like that.

Great Sky Signs During Bible Times

Nathan Jones: Now we get up to the seventh sign, which is Great Signs from the Sky. There would be signs in the heavens that would point to the soon return of Jesus Christ.

Vic Batista: The Bible tells us the people in a sense, as we might use today's word, will be "freaking out" because of these terrible things which they're going to see.

Nathan Jones: Freaking out is right! There are a lot of frightening things packed in verse 11, about how there will be great earthquakes in various places and famines and pestilence, and how there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

We can know for sure that we are truly living in the last days, for it is a time when we are seeing quite a number of these amazing signs in the sky, both from outer space and also in the atmosphere around the world.

Before the Temple fell in 70 AD, there were some signs in the sky that caused some panic. The Jewish historicist Josephus records the First Century time period. In 66 AD, at the Passover, there passed by what we know today as a comet. Halley's Comet came through, and Josephus reported that the people were "freaking out" as you say. They didn't know what it was at all.

Vic Batista: I remember a modern day comparison. It was kind of like a joke by the end. Do you remember Comet Hale-Bopp? Some groups thought it signified the end of the world.

Nathan Jones: Yes, I remember. Some people actually thought they were going to be taken off this planet by Hale-Bopp!

But, yes, there were some signs in the sky at the time just before the Temple fell. Certainly, some could have remembered Jesus' star — the Star of Bethlehem. It too was a sign in the sky.

Great Signs from the Weather

Nathan Jones: Today we have so many signs in the skies as it relates especially to weather. As we get closer to the end of this age, just before Jesus comes to rapture the Church, He tells us that these signs will come more frequently and more intensely, rather like birth pains. Remember how before a child is born the mother experiences increasingly more frequent and intense birth pains? The signs will behave just like that.

Let's look at tornados, for example, especially in 2011. That that year alone there were 1,691 tornados. In April of that year, 758 struck in just that one month. That was the single largest month of tornados recorded. People are looking up at the skies and they're seeing tornados all over the country. Tornados have died down a little this year because of the various droughts, though. Without a lot of water there are not a lot of tornados. We are still suffering from terrible droughts, which fall under the sign of famines.

Then there are hurricanes. Hurricanes especially as we get closer to Jesus' return will strike more frequently and intensely. Back in 2011, we had Hurricane Irene which killed 48 people and cost \$15.8 billion in damage. Hurricane Andrew was the third most powerful at \$40 billion in damage and 61 people died.

You probably remember Hurricane Katrina back in 2005 since you live in Florida, Pastor Vic? It was reported that 1,833 people died and cost \$133.8 billion in damages.

And so, people are looking up and they are seeing these frequent hurricanes, and they are seeing tornados, and they are seeing signs in the sky. Some people are even looking at the eclipses and wondering if they have anything to do with anything. So, there's a lot going on.

But, the weather we are experiencing today is nothing — nothing — compared to the signs in the sky that will happen during the Tribulation. That seven years of wrath which according to the book of Revelation will befall the earth before Jesus' Second Coming will rock the world to its foundations.

Vic Batista: This is why individuals need to pay attention to the signs around us. We should recognize the significance to these big numbers when we are talking about today's disasters.

I do remember Hurricane Andrew when it came through Florida and the devastation it left. The area of Homestead in South Florida, I mean, it looked like a wilderness. Everything was gone! And yet, that disaster was just a drop in the bucket in a sense compared to what the Bible says is coming during the terrible time of the Tribulation.

Nathan Jones: So sorry, Pastor Vic, that I totally forgot you had lived through Hurricane Andrew. How badly did it effect folks in Miami?

Vic Batista: It was like a little mini nuclear bomb that was dropped on this area. It was just intense, amazing, and incredible to experience! I'd moved to Florida only a few months after Hurricane Andrew hit, so fortunately I just missed it. I only saw the aftermath when I moved here. I couldn't even find a place to live because the whole area had been devastated.

Nathan Jones: Wow, that's amazing! When I moved to Dallas I found out that it experiences one of the worst storm systems in all of the country. The reason is that the area sits in the apex of three different weather patterns. When those weather patterns mix, we get terrible tornados. Right now we have been going through a multi-year drought. So, it can be tough living here weather-wise.

The Bible says that the closer we get to the last days, and I believe we are now in the last days, that storms will get much worse. Just think of the devastation Hurricane Andrew caused. I remember pictures of it and of Hurricane Katrina. The affected areas looked like a bomb had gone off, and everything was flattened.

Great Signs from Outer Space

Nathan Jones: Then we read that during the Tribulation time period how the moon will turn red like blood, and the stars will fall from to the earth. That's the Sixth Seal Judgment of Revelation 6 I'm referring to. Then we read about the First Trumpet Judgment of Revelation 8 and how there will be hail and fire that comes from the sky that also looks like blood, and it will burn up a third of the world. Can you imagine a third of the trees and a third of the grass burning up?

Vic Batista: That is just unbelievable to imagine.

Nathan Jones: Other Trumpet Judgments bring more of God's wrath upon the earth. Revelation 8-9 talk about asteroids that hit the earth until a third of the sea life dies. A mountain called Wormwood hits the freshwaters and poisons a third of the freshwater. Revelation talks about the sun and the moon darkening for a third of the day so that daylight isn't as long. Another

judgment during the Tribulation will be where smoke rises up from this hole in the earth called the Abyss and covers the sky.

We read about how the atmosphere isn't protecting people from the sun like it used to so radiation scorches the people. They curse the name of God because the punishment is so intense.

And then, just before Jesus comes at the very end of the Tribulation, there will be flashes of lightening, rumbling thunder and hailstones. These hailstones are a whopping 100 pounds! They fall upon the earth crushing both people and buildings.

Vic Batista: Nathan, I know we are not going to live through the Tribulation due to the Rapture of the Church, but those judgments just scare me, especially that last one there.

Nathan Jones: Yes, well, it should. We are talking about how the whole weather pattern of the world just goes nuts — absolutely nuts. People will be dying from all these natural disasters. They cannot drink the water. The marine population of the seas are dead. The ozone layer in the sky isn't protecting the globe so people are burning.

What this means is that by the end of the Tribulation, literally the whole ecology of the world will be teetering on the precipice of death. We are talking about the extinction of the world! If Jesus didn't come at the end of that seven year Tribulation, and if human history was allowed to keep going as it was so terribly, the Bible says that there would be nobody left alive. Every person on this planet would be dead.

Vic Batista: I was talking to my son who is 15. You know teenagers get all excited about destroying stuff. They're at the stage where everything is destruction, so we talked about this passage in Revelation regarding the meteorites and asteroids. That really caught his attention. He was like, "Really Dad?! Can you imagine if a 50 pound or 100 pound bolder hit a car?" He asked, "What would that do?" It was really exciting to see his new interest in Bible prophecy, because when we talk about Bible prophecy we also need to remember the young people and let it be an outreach to them as well.

Nathan Jones: Exactly! We're living in a terrifying yet exciting time. I remember loving Bible prophecy since I was a little kid. How strange it is that Bible prophecy is not a very popular topic right now, especially in the churches. We are just surrounded by signs of the times.

Churches understandably are very focused on all the problems that people face in daily life, but I think our churches miss out so much when we ignore the 31% of the Bible that is prophecy, because God is telling us something. He's telling us that He is coming back soon. Are our hearts ready for that? Have we given our lives to Jesus Christ? How are we living? Are we living a good life and sharing the Gospel with other people, thereby leading people to the Lord? Youth see what's going on, and they get excited about that because they know they live in one of the most exciting time periods in human history.

Pastor Vic, I'm glad your church, Calvary Chapel Aventura, is an excellent example of sharing God's prophetic message with people.

Vic Batista: Definitely, Nathan, because it's very exciting for this reason: I love it when our young people have an understanding of what is coming. It ignites them as well to live holy and pure lives. It teaches them to make the best of every opportunity to share Christ.

I'm also training up my children so that they will understand the signs of the time.

Sign of Christian Persecution

Vic Batista: Nathan, you have been taking us through this incredible journey about the judgments that Revelation tells us will happen regarding catastrophes that are coming. We read in Luke 21:11 about the "fearful sights and great signs from heaven" that Jesus foretold in this gospel. Let's now start talking about the persecution of Christians that is coming as Jesus explained in Luke 21:12-19 would happen.

Nathan Jones: Right. The eighth sign out of the ten end times signs that Jesus gave us in Luke 21 talks about the persecution of Christians. So, He goes from the natural disasters which will grow more frequent and intense, and then He switches over to explaining the persecution of His followers that will be coming.

Let's start reading with Luke 21:12:

"But before all this they [the authorities] will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons and you will be brought before kings and governors and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them, but make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourself because I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You'll be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of Me, but not a head on your head will perish by standing firm you will gain life."

Vic Batista: Great persecution was something that the Early Church suffered under, but also again in our time, and also even worse in the future. Can you talk to us a little bit about the development of Christian persecution?

Nathan Jones: Certainly, there was a tremendous amount of persecution that the Early Church faced. Everyone is familiar with the stories of the Roman Empire throwing Christians into the Coliseum and feeding them to lions and slaughter by gladiators. The Church was actually persecuted right out of the gate by the Jews, the very same ones who persecuted Jesus at the Sanhedrin. Even though everyone is responsible for Jesus' death, the first persecution came from the Jewish religious leaders of the time. Then as Christianity moved out so too did persecution by the Romans and various governors and other religions, especially Caesar worship at that time.

The twelve Apostles went out to bring the Gospel to the world, but only one of them survived without being murdered — the Apostle John. You can read *Foxe's Voice of the Martyrs* to learn the fate of each Apostle.

James son of Zebedee was beheaded in 44 AD. Matthew was killed by a halberd in 60 AD. James was beaten to death by a club after being crucified and stoned. Matthias was stoned to death and then beheaded. Andrew was crucified. Peter, as we are most familiar with, was crucified upside down. Bartholomew was flayed alive and then crucified. Thomas made it to India to share the Gospel and there he was killed by a spear. Simon the Zealot was crucified. Paul as we know was beheaded in Rome.

Those who followed after the Apostles, like Stephen, we read in Acts about how he was the first martyr. Stephen was stoned to death with Paul, who went by Saul of Tarsus at the time, who was watching on. Mark was dragged through the streets of Alexandria, Egypt before he was beheaded. Philip the Evangelist was crucified. Doctor Luke, who is the author of book Luke and Acts, was hung.

We read about how the people who saw Jesus, which was an important qualification for the position of Apostles because they had personally seen Jesus and ministered along with Him at the time — all of them died for their faith. Even John didn't get away unscathed. He was boiled, but it didn't work. His skin must have been a mess for the rest of his life. He was exiled to the Island of Patmos afterwards. We do know through Church tradition that he was later released from the Island of Patmos and made it back to Ephesus where he was a missionary and bishop.

Vic Batista: John was up there in age, right, like 90-something years old?

Nathan Jones: Yes, the Romans were trying to boil a 90 year old guy to death! I mean, they were vicious. It wasn't like, "Okay, you are a Christian and I'm a Caesar worshipper and that's okay, no problem. We'll all get along just fine." No, it didn't work that way. If you weren't a member of the State religion, you were dead. If you believed in Jesus Christ in the First Century, you gave your life up. And many, if not most, Christians did.

As time went on, and as we've gone through the last 2,000 years of the Church Age, we have seen the persecution of Christians increasing in frequency and intensity around the globe. As a matter of fact, *Foxe's Voice of the Martyrs* reads, "And yet, notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the Apostles and of men apostolical, and watered plenteously with the blood of the Saints."

Vic Batista: And we can see that persecution happening to Christians all over the earth. Persecution is something that if you call yourself a "Believer in Christ" and you are making a difference for Christ, you're going to get persecuted. That is the reality.

I'm reminded of what the Apostle John wrote in Revelation 1:9. He was writing to his friends and he said, "*I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*"

Here he relates to the persecution that all Christians were experiencing at the hands of the Romans. As you told us, Nathan, all of the Apostles with the exception of John all died martyrs.

As a pastor, I'm about finished teaching through the whole New Testament. We are in 2 John and then we are going to get into 3 John. I was sharing with our ministry that John is one of those incredible individuals who suffered so much persecution, but look what God did through him, right?

Nathan Jones: Exactly! Through John God gave us the Gospel of John, 1, 2, 3 John, and Revelation. God kept him alive because He wasn't done with him here on this earth yet.

Vic Batista: That's right. Incredible faith!

God Can Relate

Vic Batista: There's going to be an ongoing and increasing persecution of Christians in these last days. Maybe individuals reading this right now are experiencing persecution. Nathan, if you could offer a word of encouragement to those who are tuned in, that'd be great.

Nathan Jones: What I think is comforting for anyone who is going through suffering is knowing that God Himself went through suffering. He gave His Son Jesus Christ to die for you in order to take your sins upon Himself. He paid the price for our rebellion and took the punishment of death upon Himself.

God agonized over seeing His Son die. He knows what suffering and death is like. God can relate. He understands what you are going through.

It's so important that we give our lives to Jesus Christ and ask Him to forgive us of our sins. We must throw everything that is sinful in our lives away. Sin only causes us so much harm. When we live a life that's pleasing to God, He'll set our paths straight.

Though we will have suffering due to our faith in Jesus, still because of our allegiance to Savior, He will protect us. He will guide us through the problems and persecution life throws at us. But, we will be much better and stronger on the other side.

End of Program