

# SIGNS OF HIS RETURN

Have you ever wondered what the future holds? I'm not just talking about ten years from now, or even ten hours from now. I do know one thing: those who live, or die, by the stock market would certainly love to know what the future will be ten hours from now!

Forget ten hours. Someone with hard cash on a horse would like to know in advance what the *next minute* will bring.

Even a minute might be too long.

## 2 Signs of His Return

Someone at a casino, who could have a fortune depending on a toss of the die, would like to know beforehand what the next two seconds will hold.

Without a doubt, most people are interested in knowing what the future will bring. In fact, a whole industry has arisen based on this. People write books or blogs predicting what they think the future will bring. And we are all aware that the vast majority of them have been wrong.

History has proved that it's not easy to make accurate predictions, especially about the future. This is why I want to present to you some predictions that Jesus Christ made almost two thousand years ago. We have just seen that trying to predict even a minute into the future is almost impossible, which is why Jesus' predictions, made *two thousand years ago*, are so astonishing.

It hasn't exactly made front pages news, and I can probably understand why.

But in early 2018, the Internet was abuzz with Noah Novak's claims that as part of a secret "government project in America", he had been transported from the future back into our time. In fact, he said that he came from the year 2030, and even at one point was transported ahead to the year 2070.

He has offered information about his time-travel adventures. Here's what the *Sunday Express*, from England, has written about this self-proclaimed man from the future:

"Noah Novak, who has declared he is from the year 2030, claims to have met with a version of himself from the year 2070 as shocking evidence 'proved' they were both the same person.

"Noah from 2030 explained: 'He showed

a bunch of personal information, he said a bunch of things about what I did, he said all the sequence of events and stuff since I came back from 2017. He said everything that I did, and this is the type of stuff that someone would have to stalk me for my whole life to figure out.””

What was the future like, according to Noah Novak? He actually made predictions that most people who follow the news could make. For example, he said that cars were very fast; that they could be programmed to take you where you wanted to go. The fact is that self-driving vehicles are commonly spoken about, and are already being developed!

No doubt many who have had to deal with the foibles of human drivers are pleased about that news!

He made another expected prediction: that

there would be war, but that they would be using satellites from space to wage it. Once again, the concept of firing missiles or lasers from high up in space has been around for decades. He also talked about the future of artificial intelligence, the fate of Donald Trump, and the year humans finally make it to Mars.

I, for one, do not find Mr Novak's claims very credible. But, like many people, I am interested in the future. What does the future hold? What can we hope for? What will tomorrow bring?

The New Testament has recorded some of Jesus' predictions about the future. Jesus spoke specifically in connection with the last days before His return, so these are statements about the world we live in today.

Let us picture the scene almost 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem. Jesus of Nazareth

is nearing the end of His earthly ministry. The saga of the cross is looming before Him. According to the Bible, Jesus and His disciples have just left Jerusalem's famous Temple, known as Herod's Temple.

Historians agree that this must have been a magnificent and opulent structure. The disciples, like all Jews of the time, would have been justly proud of it. You can imagine them enjoying the magnificent site and calling Jesus' attention to it.

But after they pointed it out to Him, Jesus didn't say: *Yes, this is quite an amazing building, isn't it?* Or, *What a glorious structure this is, indeed!*

Come, let us "listen in" to Jesus' response:

*"Do you see all these things?" He asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown*

*down*” (Matthew 24:2, NIV).

This does not sound shocking to you and me now, because we know that is exactly what did happen. But at the time, it must have been astonishing. Let us explore the reasons.

Imagine that you’re a subject of Great Britain and that you are looking, with pride, at Buckingham Palace in London. But then someone tells you that the palace is soon going to be levelled to a pile of rubble, nothing more.

Perhaps you’re a proud citizen of China, standing before the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, and you’re told the same thing: *Enjoy it now, because it’s going to be destroyed.*

You might be a Roman Catholic looking in awe at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, when someone declares, *This great structure is*

*going to be torn down and not one stone is going to be left standing on top of another.*  
How would you feel?

That must have been how the disciples felt when they heard these quite unbelievable words from Jesus. They might have been unbelievable at the time, but just forty years later, that amazing prediction became fact. Just as Jesus had predicted, the Romans destroyed the magnificent Temple.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who was a young man of thirty-three years of age, has left us a painfully graphic depiction of the Temple's destruction.

To this day, one of the most famous religious sites in the world is the Western Wall. This was part of the grounds connected to the Jerusalem Temple. It was not part of the Temple itself because, as



Jesus had said, not a stone of the original structure would remain.

Please consider this carefully. Jesus made this prediction forty years before it happened. Forty years ago, in the late 1970s or early 1980s, who could have predicted many events that have happened in the past few years?

Did anyone predict that Donald Trump would be president of the United States?

Even two years before it happened, experts did not predict the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Did anyone predict the invention of smart phones? Imagine telling your friend forty years ago that you would be able to use your telephone to deposit a cheque into your bank account in Australia while you were in Paris! You

## 10 Signs of His Return

could justifiably have been thought to be crazy. Even 15 years ago that would have been an impossible notion.

However, Jesus made this prediction forty years before the event. This seemed as incomprehensible to His disciples as telling someone in 1980 that the Twin Towers in New York would be destroyed in 2001.

Jesus' words clearly disturbed His followers. Not long after, they were together on the Mount of Olives. In Jesus' day, this mountain was covered with olive groves. Then, as now, it was a sacred burial ground for Jews, and a special place of contemplation and prayer for pilgrims. The disciples brought up the topic again.

How, they asked, could the Temple, the sacred, holy Temple, be destroyed?

Let us pick up the conversation as it is recorded in Matthew's Gospel:

*The disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:3-5).*

Notice something very interesting. In the context of the Jewish temple, and its destruction, Jesus then points them to the signs of His coming and the end of the age: that is, the end of the world. He does this because He is using the destruction of the Temple as a symbol of what will eventually happen at the end of the world.

## 12 Signs of His Return

Jesus first told the disciples that many would come in His name, saying, “I am the Christ”. Let us consider this remarkable statement.

At the time Jesus made that statement, the Christian church barely existed. Jesus had not been crucified nor resurrected. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was still in the future.

At the moment of that conversation on the Mount of Olives, Jesus’ only followers were a small, ragtag group of men who had no real understanding of His identity or mission on earth. They were a deviant religious offshoot rejected by the leaders of their own people and by the great political power of the time, Rome.

From all outward appearances, Jesus and His followers should have disappeared from history, as had many others. In fact,

after the early Christian church got started, and Jesus' followers were being persecuted by the religious leaders, the book of Acts records something very interesting. During a meeting of Jewish leaders, convened to decide what to do with the followers of Jesus, a Pharisee named Gamaliel said:

*“Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing” (Acts 5:35-38).*

## 14 Signs of His Return

I have been a student of the Bible and Bible history for most of my adult life, and with the exception of what I have read in these few verses, I have never heard of this Theudas, who had four hundred men following him. Neither have I heard of Judas of Galilee, other than this reference.

In spite of that, here is Jesus, long before the Christian church was established, making this astonishing prediction about what would happen in His name. Jesus also predicted that people would claim to be Christ.

I cannot tell you how many people over the centuries have claimed to be Jesus, but I do know that there have been a great many. A Google search of the history of false Christs reveals dozens of people. Some of these actually started movements, even revolutions; all claimed to be Christ, the returning Messiah, Jesus Himself.

In 1982, a man named Benjamin Creme spent two hundred thousand dollars putting full-page ads in newspapers around the world, proclaiming: “THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE”. Christ, he said, would appear and bring the salvation that the world needed.

He even invited journalists to an Indian restaurant in London where he said this Christ would appear to save the world. An old man in robes did walk in. People held their breath in anticipation, but the old fellow simply asked the maître d’ for a cigarette and left.

In 2017, National Geographic magazine featured an article entitled, *Meet Five Men Who All Think They’re the Messiah*. The sub-title read: “These men say they’re the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Their disciples agree.”

That's a compelling introduction to an article! Here we have people claiming, not to be Theudas, or Judas of Galilee, but Jesus of Nazareth. This is just as Jesus Himself predicted almost two thousand years ago. Amazing words, I think, especially coming from a time when, from the human perspective, Jesus and His followers should have disappeared from history as had so many others making similar claims.

But Jesus had more to say about the signs of His coming and the future:

*“You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains” (Matthew 24:6-8, NIV).*



The truth of this statement is obvious. Wars, rumours of wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences: we see them all. We could add tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes and tornadoes as well. We all know how prevalent these events have become in the past few years alone.

I believe that Jesus wanted us to know that the world would be in turmoil before He returned. He ended this list by telling us that these things are just “the beginning of birth pangs”. That is, things are bad but they will become worse still.

Tragedies like those we have described have occurred all through history. But what’s important about these words is that, especially in recent years, humans truly believed that through science and technology, they were going to make the world a better place. They believed that we had the means to stop events like war,

famines, pestilences and earthquakes.

The global company Siemens AG had humble beginnings in a private workshop in Berlin in the 1840s. It grew to become one of the most innovative companies in the world. Its founder, Werner von Siemens, who died in 1892, stood before a group of scientists in Berlin and expressed great optimism for the future of the world due to science and technology.

*“Therefore, gentlemen we will not be shaken in our belief that our research and inventive activity leads mankind to higher levels of culture, ennobling it and making it more accessible to ideal aspirations, that the impending scientific age will diminish its hardships and its sickness, enhance its enjoyment of life, and make it better, happier, and more content with its fate.”*

There was a great deal of hope, and

maybe some truth in what he said, but world events since then have fallen short of his predictions.

Despite great technological breakthroughs, the world remains a harsh and unforgiving place with, as Jesus predicted, wars, rumours of wars, famines, earthquakes and other misery.

I would venture to suggest the opposite: that science and technology have brought a great deal of evil to our world as well.

This is a bleak picture of our world. However, Jesus did say something far more positive and hopeful. Even more astonishing than His prophecy about false Christs is the statement:

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”*

(Matthew 24:14, NIV).

Please recall that Christianity barely existed at that moment. There was just a small group of men who would be hounded, persecuted, and eventually killed for promoting their faith in Jesus. In the following centuries, the Christian church came very close to annihilation. Thousands upon thousands of Christians were martyred or exiled.

Far from being extinguished, however, Christianity is the largest faith in the world today, being found on every inhabited continent. At present, about 30 per cent of the global population identifies as Christian. Christians are trekking to every corner of the globe, seeking to do exactly what Jesus said: to take the gospel of the kingdom into “the whole world as a testimony to all nations”. We are seeing a stunning fulfilment of those words.

One positive outcome of modern technology is the worldwide spread of the “gospel of the kingdom” at an unprecedented rate.

Jesus said a great deal more about the signs we would see in the world before His second coming. To date, everything Jesus prophesied has been coming to pass precisely on time. False Christs. Wars, rumours of wars, pestilences. And, yes, the gospel of the kingdom of God is indeed being spread to all nations.

But Jesus also said something else very important and relevant about all this. We read about wars, famines, natural disasters; often they seem like events far away, as tragedies that happen in other places, or to other people.

But every now and then, one of these tragedies strikes us, or someone we know and love. When tragedy occurs

closer to home, it becomes more difficult to understand. We may begin to question God's wisdom, His goodness, or even His existence.

Jesus had this to say:

*“For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come”* (Matthew 24:5,6, NIV).

Wars and rumours of wars, but Jesus says, “Don't be alarmed”. Why? Because these things must happen. But know that, when they do, the end will eventually come.

It can be so easy at times of tragedy to wonder about God, what He is like, if He

cares, or even if He exists. Here, Jesus is telling us:

*Bad things will happen. You cannot escape them in a world of sin. But don't be alarmed, don't be discouraged by them. Don't lose faith in Me or My promises. I am coming back!*

Our world can be a scary place, a place of very little security. Overnight, everything you worked for can be lost, gone forever. Who hasn't experienced just how fragile our existence is? It can sometimes seem as if we exist on the edge of a precipice, and that the next instant we might fall over the edge.

Let us turn to Jesus and His words to us. They are words of comfort, hope and assurance. You may be fearful, or worried. Perhaps you wonder how you will cope with an unknown future. You owe it to

## 24 Signs of His Return

yourself to learn more about Jesus. Learn what He has said. Discover the promises He has made to you, for they are indeed made to you, personally!

Let's not trust uncertain claims about the future. Instead, let's listen to Jesus' wonderful words of truth, and prepare to enjoy a glorious future in heaven with Him.