

GNITN

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ARE THESE THE END TIMES?

The Signs Jesus Named Are Speeding Up

Nothing Is Different

Last time we looked at persecution as a sign Jesus named in the Olivet Discourse. Today we're going through the rest of His list. But there's a fair objection worth answering first, because someone in your circle will raise it. Wars, famines, earthquakes, and moral decay have been happening since the beginning of recorded history - Rome fell to invaders, the Black Death killed a third of Europe. None of that is new. So what makes right now any different from any other century a preacher could point to and say *this is it*? Jesus answers that question Himself, inside the very passage skeptics quote against it. The answer sits in one word He chose - a word that changes how the whole list should be read.

Birth Pains, Not Background Noise

After listing false christs, wars, famines, and earthquakes, Jesus summarizes: "All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8). The word translated "sorrows" in the NKJV is the Greek ōdin - a specific medical term for labor contractions, not generic suffering. Matthew wasn't reaching for a vague word for pain. He picked the one word in Greek that means childbirth travail. That word choice is Jesus's own built-in answer to *"this has always happened."* A woman's body produces contractions early in labor and again in the final minutes before delivery - technically the same phenomenon, but nobody confuses the two. What changes is *intensity and frequency* (Scott LaPierre), not whether contractions exist at all. Jesus isn't telling His disciples these things will start in the last days. He's telling them these things will converge, accelerate, and cluster right before the end - the way contractions two minutes apart mean something that contractions two hours apart don't. That's the lens for everything below: not whether a sign has happened before, but whether it's now converging, accelerating, and visible to the whole world at once in a way no earlier century could manage.

False Christs and False Prophets

Jesus warned three separate times: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5); "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" (Matthew 24:11); and "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders, to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). The Greek behind "false christs" is pseudochristos - a counterfeit anointed one - and behind "deceive" is planaō, the same root that gives us the word "planet" - a wanderer, something that doesn't stay on a fixed course. False messiahs are nothing new - Bar Kokhba raised a revolt claiming messianic status in AD 132. But that deception traveled by horse and stayed regional for years. What's different now is reach. AI can generate a fabricated miracle on video and put it in front of a billion people within hours. Cult leader Avraham Zagdun openly claims to be the Messiah, and AI Jesus chatbots already circulate widely, built by tech companies rather than churches (Malcolm Diaz). Deceiving "even the elect" at a planetary, simultaneous scale is a mechanical possibility that simply did not exist until this generation.

Wars and Rumors of Wars

Jesus continued: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:6-7). The Greek for "troubled" is [throeō](#), meaning inwardly alarmed or thrown into panic - the very thing He's telling them not to be. And "nation will rise against nation" literally reads [ethnos epi ethnos](#) - people group upon people group. War itself is as old as Cain. The objection is fair on its own terms. What's changed is the word "rumors" - in the ancient world, news of a war traveled by messenger and arrived weeks or months late, often garbled. Most people in history knew of one conflict in their lifetime, if that. Today roughly 46 active armed conflicts are underway across 76 countries at the same moment, tracked in real time and quantified in the same calendar year ([ACLED-based tracking](#)). Nation rising against nation used to mean a local skirmish nobody two valleys over heard about for months. Now it's a documented, simultaneous, globally visible pattern spanning every inhabited continent - something no prior generation could see or measure, because the technology to see it globally, at once, didn't exist.

Famines (and Pestilences)

The next verse names two more: "and there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places" (Matthew 24:7). "Famines" is [limos](#) and "pestilences" is [loimos](#) - two Greek words a single letter apart. The NKJV keeps both because it follows the Majority Text tradition; some modern translations drop "pestilences" because a handful of older manuscripts omit it. Famine goes back to Joseph in Egypt and Ruth's Bethlehem - not a new category of suffering. What's different now is the cause. War, not weather, now drives most global hunger, according to the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)). For the first time in the ten-year history of the Global Report on Food Crises, famine was confirmed in two places in the same year - parts of Gaza and parts of Sudan ([Global Report on Food Crises](#)). More than 266 million people across 47 countries are facing acute food insecurity, tracked by a coordinated eighteen-agency global monitoring system that didn't exist a century ago. Gaza's famine carries another layer worth naming directly, and it isn't new ground for this audience. Back when aid distribution centers cut Hamas out of the loop, our own coverage documented Hamas setting up checkpoints to keep Gazans from reaching that food ([GNITN: Aid Gets In](#)). Months later, when U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff personally toured Gaza and reported no starvation, we covered why: no real shortage, just Hamas "stealing the food and selling it back to them at exorbitant prices" ([GNITN: No Starvation Seen](#)). Outside reporting backs the same pattern - Israel, the United States, and independent observers have documented Hamas stealing, taxing, and diverting aid meant for civilians throughout the war ([AJC](#)), and the BBC found Hamas drew on a hidden cash stockpile and looted supplies to pay its own fighters, with stolen aid "sold on the black market for inflated prices" ([Times of Israel](#)). Controlling the grain, then selling it back to the hungry for profit and power, is a tactic Scripture calls out by name: "you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail... that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals - even sell the bad wheat" (Amos 8:4-6). Manufacture the shortage, then profit from it. A famine used as leverage isn't collateral damage from war - it's a deliberate weapon.

Earthquakes in Various Places

Same verse, third item: "and there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places" (Matthew 24:7). "Earthquakes" is [seismos](#) - the root of "seismology." The phrase "in various places" is doing real work here - it's not describing frequency, it's describing spread.

The ground has always shaken - that objection stands, and even secular geologists confirm 2026's overall quake frequency sits within a normal historical range ([Global News](#)). But the sign Jesus named isn't frequency alone - it's *various places*. This year, magnitude 7.0-plus quakes have struck five countries on three continents within a matter of months: the Philippines, Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia, and Indonesia ([Tempo.co](#)), each known to the whole planet the same day it happened. Ancient people experienced earthquakes as isolated regional events, discovered separately, months apart; we experience them as a single global pattern in real time - a way of seeing "*various places*" no earlier century had the technology to see.

Lawlessness Increasing, Love Growing Cold

Further into the discourse: ["And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" \(Matthew 24:12\)](#). "Lawlessness" is [anomia](#) - literally, without Torah, without God's law as a reference point. "Grow cold" translates [psychō](#), a verb used elsewhere for a fire dying down or a body losing its heat. Paul uses the noun form of [anomia](#) to describe ["the mystery of lawlessness" \(2 Thessalonians 2:7\)](#) already at work, and John writes plainly that ["sin is lawlessness" \(1 John 3:4\)](#).

People have sinned since Eden - that objection is true and obvious. But this verse isn't mainly describing crime rates or social isolation. Read alongside the rest of the New Testament, *love growing cold* is describing something happening inside the church, not just outside it. Paul names the same pattern directly: ["Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" \(1 Timothy 4:1\)](#), and again, ["Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first" \(2 Thessalonians 2:3\)](#). "Falling away" translates [apostasia](#) - the exact root of the English word "*apostasy*." This isn't lawlessness making people harder to reach. It's lawlessness cooling love for God among people who already knew Him. Jesus asks the question directly Himself, and He leaves it open rather than answering it: ["Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" \(Luke 18:8\)](#). The Greek carries a definite article - [tēn pistin](#), *the faith*, not merely belief in general but the persevering, keep-praying-anyway kind of faith the parable just described. He's not asking whether religion will still exist. He's asking whether that specific, stubborn faith will still be found. Believers have fallen away in every century - Judas walked with Jesus Himself and still fell away. What's different now is that the scale and pace are documented with a precision no earlier generation had the tools to measure. In the United States, the share of adults identifying as Christian has fallen from 78 percent in 2007 to 62 percent today, while the religiously unaffiliated - the "*nones*" - have grown from 16 percent to 29 percent over that same stretch ([Pew Research Center](#)). Among Gen Z, weekly worship attendance sits at just 18 percent, and by age 30, nearly half of Americans have never attended a religious service at all ([church attendance research](#)). That's a documented generational cliff in the very faith Jesus wondered aloud whether He'd find.

The Gospel Preached to All Nations

Not every sign on this list is a warning. One is a promise: ["And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" \(Matthew 24:14\)](#). "All the world" is [oikoumenē](#) - the whole inhabited earth, the same word used for the entire Roman Empire in its day. "Nations" is [ethnē](#), the identical word Jesus uses in the Great Commission's ["make disciples of all the nations" \(Matthew 28:19\)](#). And "witness" is [martyrion](#) - testimony, evidence formally presented.

For nineteen centuries this promise sat there technically true but practically unreachable - a missionary on foot or by ship might reach one people group in a lifetime. That's why this is the angle worth getting excited about, not worried about. As of this year, about 7.6 billion people have access to some Scripture in their own language, with 4,121 of the world's 7,393 languages carrying at least a portion of it ([United Bible Societies](#)). Joshua Project counts roughly 17,300 distinct people groups worldwide, with about 7,200 still classified as unreached ([Joshua Project](#)). Bible translation software, satellite broadcast, and Internet distribution mean the remaining gap is closing inside a single generation - something no century of church history before this one had the tools to attempt. The finish line Jesus described is closer to achievable right now than at any point in the two thousand years since He said it.

The Fig Tree Buds: Israel Reborn

Jesus closes this section of the discourse with a parable most people read past: *"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near - at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place"* (Matthew 24:32-34).

Scripture repeatedly uses the fig tree as a picture of the nation of Israel itself: *"When I found Israel, it was like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season"* (Hosea 9:10), and Jeremiah's vision of good and bad figs standing for the exiles of Judah ([Jeremiah 24](#)). Rome destroyed the Temple in AD 70 and scattered the Jewish people for nearly nineteen centuries - the fig tree, by every appearance, dead. Then on May 14, 1948, the nation was reborn in a single day, and Hebrew - a language that had not been anyone's spoken mother tongue for close to two thousand years - became a living national language again ([Reasons for Hope](#)). This is the one sign on the list different in kind from all the others. Wars, famines, quakes, and cold love are recurring patterns that intensify - they've always existed and always will. Israel's rebirth isn't recurring. It happened exactly once, to exactly one dispersed people, in all of recorded history, and by definition cannot happen again. It's a single, fixed marker Jesus pointed His disciples toward by name - and it already happened, within living memory of people still alive today.

The Pattern, Not the Panic

Put it together and the *"this has always happened"* objection actually proves the point rather than defeating it. No single item on this list is new. What's new is the convergence: deception with planetary reach for the first time ever, war tracked as a live global pattern for the first time ever, famine confirmed and weaponized in two places at once for the first time in a decade of formal monitoring, major quakes on three continents visible to the whole world the same day, a documented generational falling-away from persevering faith, a genuinely achievable finish line for reaching every people group with the gospel for the first time in church history - and underneath all of it, a fig tree that budded in 1948 and cannot bud that way again. That's the difference between background noise and labor pains. So here's the challenge for this week: pick one thread from today and do one concrete thing that pushes back against it in someone else's life. Reach out to the one person you know who's drifted from their faith and actually talk with them, not at them. Give toward famine relief in Sudan or anywhere in the world and especially Christian ones that are giving a cup of water in the name of the Lord. Pray by name for one unreached people group. Don't just watch the signs converge - be Jesus to one of them for somebody this week.