

Life Group Notes 12/17/2023

Pastor Mark Warren The Wise Men and “The Good the Bad and the Ugly of Signs” People of the Bible

[No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at tbeachhead@comcast.net. Thank you for taking the time—Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.]

Remember: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP.** BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP’S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! **Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.**

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 12/17. Let’s allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.** I include each of the passages mentioned in full, to facilitate the enjoyment of these notes. Footnotes are not meant to distract. This week’s footnotes include:

1. [On signs and wonders.](#)
2. [On the Magi/Wise men from the east.](#)

*****Important:** At the very [end of these notes](#), I’ve included passages that were mentioned in this week’s message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week. ***

Look up Matthew’s account in chapter 2: *1After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 2asking, “Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”*

3When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4And when he had assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

*6‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah,
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of My people Israel.’”*

7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and learned from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8And sending them to Bethlehem, he said: “Go and search carefully for the Child, and when you find Him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship Him.”

9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the Child was. 10When they saw the star, they rejoiced with great delight. 11On coming to the house, they saw the Child with His

mother Mary, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

*12*And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they withdrew to their country by another route.

Pastor titled this message "The Good the Bad and the Ugly of Signs."

1. What do you see? Do you see anything new?
2. Where do the Wisemen come from? What is in the east?
3. Why did they come?
4. To what city did they first come? Why?
5. Were they Jews? What is the significance of Gentiles coming this far?
6. How could they know anything of "He who is to be born king of the Jews?" (What wise Jew grew up in the East and left a record of prophecies?)
7. How many wise men were there? Why do we say three?
8. What was the significance of each of the gifts? Do you remember?
9. What sign brought them? Can you explain it? What have you heard of the star?
10. In the nativity account, what signs have we already seen?
11. Who saw these signs? Make a list of names of people who saw strange signs and interpreted them correctly from the accounts we've been reading.
12. What did each do when they saw them? What was the purpose of each sign?

Mark begins with signs from the good perspective. Signs have been known to help make decisions.

1. God uses signs to communicate to us.
2. Signs should always lead us to Jesus.
3. Signs can cultivate faith.
4. Look up Acts 2:*17*'In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. *18*Even on My menservants and maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. *19*I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. *20*The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and glorious Day of the Lord. *21*And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'
5. List the signs you see in this prophecy. How many have you personally witnessed?
6. What signs are you seeing today? What is your response?

Mark speaks of the negative aspects of signs, and reminds us that Satan tempted Jesus to seek signs by putting the Promise of God to the test in Matthew 4: *5*Then the devil took Him to the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple. *6*"If You are the Son of God," he said, "throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning You, and they will lift You up in their hands, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" *7*Jesus replied, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test,'" The devil quotes the promise from Psalm 91, and Jesus responds quoting Deuteronomy 6:13.

1. What do you see?
2. Why does Jesus not need "confirmation" to know that Psalm 91 is true?
3. Look at what Gideon does in Judges 6: *33*Then all the Midianites, Amalekites, and other people of the east gathered together, crossed over the Jordan, and camped in

the Valley of Jezreel. [34](#)So the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, who blew the ram's horn and rallied the Abiezrites behind him. [35](#)Calling them to arms, Gideon sent messengers throughout Manasseh, as well as Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, so that they came up to meet him. [36](#)Then Gideon said to God, "If You are going to save Israel by my hand, as You have said, [37](#)then behold, I will place a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that You are going to save Israel by my hand, as You have said." [38](#)And that is what happened. When Gideon arose the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. [39](#)Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me; let me speak one more time. Please allow me one more test with the fleece. This time let it be dry, and the ground covered with dew." [40](#)And that night God did so. Only the fleece was dry, and dew covered the ground. What do you see? What did Gideon need? Why? Do you have a testimony where you sought a sign/fleece? What happened? Why did God respond this way to Gideon's request?

4. Look up Deuteronomy 13: [1](#)If a prophet or dreamer of dreams arises among you and proclaims a sign or wonder to you, [2](#)and if the sign or wonder he has spoken to you comes about, but he says, "Let us follow other gods (which you have not known) and let us worship them," [3](#)you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. For the LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul. [4](#)You are to follow the LORD your God and fear Him. Keep His commandments and listen to His voice; serve Him and hold fast to Him. What is the warning here? What stumbling block do signs sometimes produce? Are signs and wonders always reliable proof that God is speaking? What authenticates the sign? (See [note two](#) above.)
5. What do you think: What is the sign/evidence that God is moving in our midst?
6. Have you ever been in a situation where the focus was on the signs, and not on healthy growth in the knowledge of Jesus? Do you have a testimony?
7. Look at Matthew 12: [38](#)Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." [39](#)Jesus replied, "A wicked and adulterous generation demands a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. [40](#)For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." What were the scribes and Pharisees actually looking for?
8. How many signs had the scribes and Pharisees already seen by chapter 12 without repenting? How many excuses do you need to justify not repenting?
9. What was Jonah's response to the sign he was given?
10. Were the people of Nineveh seeking signs in order to repent? Or was Jonah's message enough?
11. God gave Jonah the sign. He gave the people of Nineveh Jonah. Who benefitted most from the sign of Jonah? Was the sign given for Jonah's edification? Or to save a nation?

Pastor Mark enumerates for us signs that scripture foretells, that are given for us to be forewarned.

- **Increased global conflict:** Matthew 24: [4](#)Jesus answered, "See to it that no one deceives you. [5](#)For many will come in My name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will

deceive many. [6](#)You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. These things must happen, but the end is still to come. [7](#)Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8](#)All these are the beginning of birth pains.

1. What signs are listed here?
 2. How many have you seen?
 3. Are there more today than ever? Can you pray for these places?
- **Increased natural disaster and strife:** Luke 21: [10](#)Then He told them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. [11](#)There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places, along with fearful sights and great signs from heaven.
 1. What do you see?
 2. Which signs bother you most?
 3. Do you have a testimony? How does strife in a family become a sign of Christ's return?
 - **Increase in lawlessness and immorality:** 2 Timothy 3: [1](#)*But understand this: In the last days terrible times will come. [2](#)For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3](#)unloving, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, without love of good, [4](#)traitorous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5](#)having a form of godliness but denying its power. Turn away from such as these!* And remember Matthew 24: [11](#)*and many false prophets will arise and mislead many. [12](#)Because of the multiplication of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. [13](#)But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.*
 1. What do false prophets not lead to?
 2. How many of these characteristics do you struggle with?
 3. Think of the entertainment industry. How effective have they become in promoting these traits?
 - **Increased persecution:** Luke 21: [12](#)But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. On account of My name they will deliver you to the synagogues and prisons, and they will bring you before kings and governors. [13](#)This will be your opportunity to serve as witnesses. [14](#)So make up your mind not to worry beforehand how to defend yourselves. [15](#)For I will give you speech and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. [16](#)You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death. [17](#)And you will be hated by everyone because of My name. [18](#)Yet not even a hair of your head will perish. [19](#)By your patient endurance you will gain your souls. Compare this with Matthew 24: [9](#)Then they will deliver you over to be persecuted and killed, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. [10](#)At that time many will fall away and will betray and hate one another
 1. What is the warning you see?
 2. How does one prepare for this?
 3. Look at verses 14 and 15 from Luke above: What is the promise?

4. How do we know that prophecy and supernatural prophetic utterance can still be expected today (v. 15)? Do you have a testimony where you have been given words to speak that were wiser than you are naturally?
- **False prophets will arise.** Look at Jesus' warning in Matthew 24: *23 At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There He is!' do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders that would deceive even the elect, if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you in advance.*
 1. According to Deuteronomy [above](#), why does He tell us in advance?
 2. What authenticates a true prophet? Where does they always point?
 3. How do you recognize false teaching? How do you test doctrine?
- **Rebirth of Israel.** Look up Ezekiel 37: *11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Look, they are saying, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished; we are cut off.' 12 Therefore prophesy and tell them that this is what the Lord GOD says: 'O My people, I will open your graves and bring you up from them, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, My people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.'" Look also at Isaiah 66: *5 You who tremble at His word, hear the word of the LORD: "Your brothers who hate you and exclude you because of My name have said, 'Let the LORD be glorified that we may see your joy!' But they will be put to shame." 6 Hear the uproar from the city; listen to the voice from the temple! It is the voice of the LORD, repaying His enemies what they deserve! 7 "Before she was in labor, she gave birth; before she was in pain, she delivered a boy. 8 Who has heard of such as this? Who has seen such things? Can a country be born in a day, or a nation be delivered in an instant? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her children. 9 Shall I bring a baby to the point of birth and not deliver it?" says the LORD. "Or will I who deliver close the womb?" says your God.*
 1. What do you see? Do you know of any nation that was born in a day?
 2. What part of this prophecy is still missing, unfulfilled?
 3. Is there evidence of the Holy Spirit in Israel today? Can this prophecy be fulfilled without Him filling believing Israel?*
- **The gospel will be preached to all nations.** Matthew 24:14 *14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*
 1. What is there today that makes this imminently possible?
 2. What is the "gospel of the kingdom?" What is it not?

Pastor summarizes the biblical warnings.

- They need to lead us to Jesus.
- They need to make us aware of times and seasons. And he points out, we do not have to know everything. Read James 1: *5 Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith, without doubting, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

1. What do you see? Is there a problem with asking?
 2. What happens when you ask?
- They need to drive us back to scripture. Look at 2 Timothy 3: [14](#)*But as for you, continue in the things you have learned and firmly believed, since you know from whom you have learned them. [15](#)From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16](#)All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17](#)so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.*
 1. What advice does Paul the elder give Timothy the pastor?
 2. What are the benefits of scripture? List them.
 3. How does scripture equip us?
 - They need to put us in fellowship with mature believers. Look at Proverbs 11:14 [14](#)*For lack of guidance, a nation falls, but with many counselors comes deliverance.*
 1. What do you see?
 2. How are we doing as a nation?
 3. To whom do you go for wise counsel?

Pastor Mark closes by talking about the sign that led the Magi to Jesus. It was a celestial sign that made them aware of what was transpiring in another land. Reflect: What signs have led you to this point? Look at Luke 21: [25](#)*There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among the nations, bewildered by the roaring of the sea and the surging of the waves. [26](#)Men will faint from fear and anxiety over what is coming upon the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [27](#)At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. [28](#)When these things begin to happen, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

1. What signs are listed here?
2. Contrast men's reaction to what ours should be according to Jesus.
3. Why does James tell us to count our trials as joy? (James 1)

Now look at how Jesus describes our remaining time: [29](#)*Then Jesus told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. [30](#)When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. [31](#)So also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. [32](#)Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. [33](#)Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.*

1. How close are we?
2. Can you know dates? Can you know seasons?
3. What do you need to do to get ready?

Here's how Jesus closes this lesson: [34](#)*But watch yourselves, or your hearts will be weighed down by dissipation, drunkenness, and the worries of life—and that day will spring upon you suddenly like a snare. [35](#)For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of all the earth. [36](#)So keep watch at all times, and pray that you may have the strength to escape all that is about to happen and to stand before the Son of Man."*

1. List the warnings.
2. How are you doing?

3. What does an escape look like in this context?
4. Have you prayed to have the strength? Take the time to pray now.

The Follow-up Application

1. Use the [SOAP journal studies](#) below throughout the week.
2. Pray for those who are persecuting you this week. Look for ways to bless them.
3. List steps you want to take.
4. Pray that you may have the strength to escape all that is about to happen and to stand before the Son of Man.

Take the time to pray.

Scribe's Notes:

1. **On signs and wonders**—The language of signs and wonders in Hebrew and Greek help to understand the biblical concept that is taught consistently, and that threads itself conspicuously throughout the biblical narrative. In the Hebrew language two words in particular get translated “signs and wonders.” The first, אֹת (*oth*) gets translated “banners (1), omens (1), pledge (1), sign (43), signs (30), standards (1), witness (1), wondrous (1)” according to Strong’s. It appears 79 times in the Old Testament, and could likewise be translated “badge,” because it identifies an event or an action with its Cause and Mover. As a policeman has no identity without his badge, so God is identified, recognized and known by His banner/oth/signs. Wonder in Hebrew is מִוִּפְתַּי (*mopheth*), and it’s translated marvel (1), marvels (3), miracle (1), miracles (1), sign (8), symbol (1), token (1), wonder (4), wonders (17). It’s defined as a “wonder, a special display of God’s power.” In Greek, there are three words, important to know, used to convey the understanding: First, δύναμις (*dunamis*) which is variously translated ability (4), meaning (1), mightily (1), mighty (1), miracle (2), miracles (17), miraculous powers (3), power (83), powers (6), strength (2), wealth (1). It is at the root of our word dynamite. When Paul talks about the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, *dunamis* is listed, and gets translated as “miracles.” A better translation would be the gift of “powers.” Next, σημεῖον (*semeion*) a **sign, prodigy, portent**, i.e. an unusual occurrence, transcending the common course of nature. The Greek LXX version of the OT, uses *semeion* for the Hebrew *oth*. Finally, τέρας (*teras*) is a miraculous wonder, done to elicit a reaction from onlookers; an extraordinary event with supernatural effect left on all witnessing it, i.e. a *portent* from heaven to earth. The LXX uses *teras* for the Hebrew *mopheth*. Unusual signs are always given to distinguish normal events of nature from acts of God.
2. **On the Magi/Wisemen**—Very little is known of the Magi, a Greek word for the wise, who study and are rich in history and science. From the

word, we get “magician” and “mage.” Kings surrounded themselves with scholars to advise them and help interpret times and seasons. Daniel was one of these. Look up Daniel 2. It is the story of desperation as the king dreamed a dream and no mage could describe the dream or interpret its content, until Daniel was called in. Daniel was told the dream by the LORD, and described it in detail to Nebuchadnezzar. *31As you, O king, were watching, a great statue appeared. A great and dazzling statue stood before you, and its form was awesome. 32The head of the statue was pure gold, its chest and arms were silver, its belly and thighs were bronze, 33its legs were iron, and its feet were part iron and part clay. 34As you watched, a stone was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and crushed them. 35Then the iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold were shattered and became like chaff on the threshing floor in summer. The wind carried them away, and not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that had struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. 36This was the dream; now we will tell the king its interpretation... 40Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; for iron shatters and crushes all things, and like iron that crushes all things, it will shatter and crush all the others. 41And just as you saw that the feet and toes were made partly of fired clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom, yet some of the strength of iron will be in it—just as you saw the iron mixed with clay. 42And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. 43As you saw the iron mixed with clay, so the peoples will mix with one another, but will not hold together any more than iron mixes with clay. 44In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will shatter all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself stand forever. 45And just as you saw a stone being cut out of the mountain without human hands, and it shattered the iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold, so the great God has told the king what will happen in the future. The dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy.” Daniel was allowed to tell the impact and power of the advent of Christ on the nations. These writings were studied by the wisemen of the East right up to the days of Christ, and they knew the times and the seasons. We do not know the identities of the Magi, nor of their origins. Much is left to conjecture, and there is no lack thereof. Even their names find their way in song...with Armenian, Ethiopian and Eastern Orthodox each asserting their own conjectures as history. We know what Matthew writes, and we know the disastrous impact their coming to the land had on Bethlehem, as the prophets foretold. They stand as another example of God’s providential communication with those whose hearts are perfect toward Him...and of the way God provides for the well-being of His beloved. No one ever mentions the impact the gifts of gold and wealth had on Joseph’s financial needs in his coming travels.*

For further study:

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP**... (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—What is God saying? / **P**ray—What is your response?) ...method to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: Deuteronomy 13:1-4
Tuesday: Acts 2:17-21
Wednesday: James 1:5-7
Thursday: Matthew 24:23-25
Friday: 2 Corinthians 1:18-20
Saturday: Isaiah 9:6-7
Sunday: Luke 21:12-15

Once again, some passages suggested here have more than the usual number of verses. This is not to increase the burden but to provide clarity of context. Pick the verses that speak to you most clearly, and run these through the SOAP steps.