

Warning In The Wind

A Swarm of Spring Tornados

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Almost every week we say, "It's a beautiful day here in the Carolinas," or "it's raining here in Fort Mill," or somehow touch the topic of weather just because it is there. It is an easy way to start a conversation because we are always talking about the weather; we say, "Hey! How's the weather out in your neck of the woods?" Well, today I want to talk about the weather.

There is no doubt that, beyond the political news that we hear about so frequently, the big topic on the news this spring has been the very violent and deadly weather that has laid waste to parts of this nation. It has been mostly tornadoes that have passed through the Midwest, the South, and even here on June 1st there was one up in New England. We hardly consider New England to be tornado alley but they had a series of tornadoes that ended up killing four people.

Massachusetts? Really? Tornadoes? We do not think of tornadoes happening there; Kansas or Oklahoma is where they have tornadoes. It is like a daily occurrence there, is it not? Massachusetts? The nation has not seen such destructive weather for a great many years, if ever! The accompanying loss of life in these tornadoes has been catastrophic. Let me give you some numbers to help you understand how bad it has been this spring.

As of June 1, 2011 there have been 1,415 tornadoes reported in the United States and 1,007 of them have been confirmed. There is a range there; there may have been up to 1,415 tornadoes but they know that there have been at least 1,007. These numbers mean little to us without some sort of comparison. Ok, maybe we have 1,415 every 6 months; no, we have to make a comparison with other times. This number, 1,415 or 1,007, put 2011 on a record pace for tornado activity. The previous maximum number of tornadoes (through June 1st) was 928 confirmed tornadoes. 928 confirmed verses 1,007 confirmed or 1,415 reported. Depending on how you count it, that is as many as 500 more tornadoes over the first 5 months of the year.

May tends to be the month having the highest number of tornado occurrences of the year; although, this year, it was April and I will get to that in just a second. If this trend continues, we can expect more than 2,000 tornadoes for 2011 and it would be a record; the most in any year.

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It has also been a very deadly year concerning tornadoes. So far, there have been 537 confirmed deaths from tornadoes worldwide. This is counting the whole globe. They have had tornadoes in New Zealand and Bangladesh, the Philippines, and I heard there was even one in Russia. Of these 537 confirmed deaths, 518 occurred in the United States. That is unreal. Normally, you do not think that the United States leads the casualty list in weather-related acts. But, in this case, through June 1st, the United States has 518 of 537 confirmed deaths. That is approaching 97 percent. The other deaths have been in Bangladesh, New Zealand, and the Philippines and in those cases it was one here, one there. Very few were outside of the United States.

Another astounding fact to compare to these 518 deaths in the United States: Compare these 518 deaths to 564 fatalities due to tornadoes over the last 10 years in the United States. What I am saying is: We have had 10 times more deaths due to tornadoes this year than we have in a normal year tracking over the last 10 years.

Most of these 518 deaths occurred in 2 major catastrophes. The April 27th super-outbreak over the South killed 322 all by itself and 135 died in the May 22nd tornado that devastated Joplin, Missouri. These figures may be adjusted as we go. Together, these tornadoes or outbreaks account for nearly 460 of the 518 deaths.

I told you a few minutes ago that April 2011 was the most active month for tornadoes on record and it was by far the most active April more than doubling the previous record in April 1974 where there were only 267 tornadoes. April for this year, 2011, had 673 confirmed tornadoes. That is roughly half of the year's tornadoes so far.

The super-outbreak occurring April 23-28 alone contained 12 category EF4 and 3 EF5 tornadoes. EF5 is the most destructive tornado possible. On April 27th, a very large tornado struck Tuscaloosa, Alabama killing at least 63.

Later, the damage was called "catastrophic" and you have probably seen some of the pictures. A large tornado in the same super-cell hit Birmingham just a little while later. The television reporters there filming the tornado reported that the funnel of this tornado was so wide that cameramen several miles away could not zoom their cameras out far enough to get the whole funnel in a single frame. It was that wide.

The Weather Channel reported that the parent super-cell of this Tuscaloosa-Birmingham tornado was responsible for a long string of tornadoes after that which formed over Mississippi and continued across Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and the northwestern tip of South Carolina before dissipating in southern North Carolina. That single super-cell made a rampage of over 300 miles.

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At approximately 5:41pm on Sunday, May 22nd, another huge, multi-vortex tornado (it had multiple funnels) hit Joplin, Missouri. It was measured at three-fourths of a mile wide and rated as an EF5 with estimated winds from 225-250 miles per hour. I am sure you have seen the devastation there. Hundreds of houses, buildings, and businesses in the southern part of the city were flattened and some were simply blown away.

Today, I was looking at some pictures that one of our brethren had taken of Joplin and it is amazing. The trees are denuded of leaves and, after looking closely, it looked like some of the bark had been torn away from some of these trees. It is hard to imagine surviving through something that destructive with all that stuff being blown around.

I read another report this week that said a doctor ran outside after tending to some of the people who were in the hospital and found a man who had been impaled with a road sign. It went right through his chest. There was an amazing amount of power in the storm that struck Joplin.

The main hospital was heavily damaged and the estimation of people who were trapped in destroyed homes was near 17; they were found the next day under the rubble. Entire communities were flattened. Going down the streets, you could see that the houses, left and right, were just gone. Piles of timber and housing material were left but the structure was all gone.

I saw an interesting satellite photo that showed a swath of destruction going right through that area and on the edges one side of the street is untouched and the other side is completely destroyed. The death toll there has risen to at least 138 and there have been more than 1,000 injured. A large part of Joplin has been wiped off the map; it is just not there, and the estimated cost to rebuild the city is up to 3 billion dollars. That is devastation!

While these two were the most lethal and damaging of this swarm of tornadoes, others have struck all over the country. Most of the deaths have occurred in the South; in the lower Midwest. These states have had deaths: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Deaths from tornadoes have also occurred not in the South or the Midwest but Oklahoma, Kansas, Minnesota, and Massachusetts.

However, tornadoes have not only caused deaths but also destruction in other places as well. There have been tornadoes in California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin this year. You would expect so with 1,007 or 1,415 striking all across the

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country. If you have not been in the path of one of these severe weather systems you can count yourself blessed. They have been all over the country causing a lot of damage and a lot of death.

Okay, so it has happened. We have all of these facts and figures behind us to say, "What does all this storming, deadly weather mean?" Is there any meaning to it or is it a natural thing that once every hundred years we have swarms of tornadoes that come up and cause a lot of destruction? Did you know that the Bible has a lot to say about windstorms and whirlwinds? Because of that, we are going to go through Scripture about what God has to say about these stormy, windy events.

Let us go through and see what His hand is in these events and perhaps we will answer these questions: Could we be experiencing a warning from God? Is this a sign of the end? How should we react to the fact that they have occurred?

We will start in Genesis 7:1 because, when studying a major umbrella subject, we are always well served to begin with the first biblical mention. This first comment often sets the tone for the subject. We can get an idea from the very first reference what God really thinks, how we are supposed to look at it, and what kind of perspective we are supposed to have.

In this case, the first notation of a lethal storm is the Flood. We will hop, skip, and jump through chapter 7 because it is setup as a series of parallelisms where He describes what happened in the Flood, His instructions to Noah, what God did, and what ultimately resulted.

There are four or five different parallel explanations of this same thing; it intensifies the lesson to make it seem very real to help us to understand that, "Hey, this is something God wants us to understand."

Genesis 7:1 Then the Lord said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.

Genesis 7:4 For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made."

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Genesis 7:11-12 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

Genesis 7:21-23 And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died.

So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth; only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.

Here we have the first indication of a major storm as a catastrophe. Actually, it is the first mention of things like rain; there was a note in Genesis 2 that said it had not rained. Here we have the first mention of a *lethal* storm. We call it the Flood; the deluge. But really, it was the most catastrophic windstorm and rainstorm that the world has ever seen. If we wanted to, we could call it the mother of all storms. We tend to focus on the fact that the waters rose up so high that they covered even the tallest mountains.

Where did all that water come from? The Bible tells us in Genesis 7:11 that there were two main places that it came from: The fountains of the great deep (meaning the waters under the earth) were opened up and it also says that the waters of heaven were opened up, so the waters that were above the earth came down and these both caused the waters on the earth to rise so that, as seen in verse 17, the ark was lifted up and it rose high above the earth.

We seem to emphasize the fact that this water collected up and rose; we do not seem to remember that it came down out of the sky as rain and I think it is a safe assumption to say that there was constant, heavy rain, wind, lightning, and thunder like the most massive thunderstorm imaginable that occurred during these 40 days and 40 nights.

I do not think we can believe that it was a nice, gentle drizzle when suddenly there were a couple of miles worth of water on top of the earth. No, it had to come down in *huge* amounts and because of all of this water coming down and changing atmospheric pressures it would cause wind. The fronts hitting one another and all that happens every day would have caused lightning and thunder and it would have been really scary. It

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would have been the most tumultuous storm that one has ever been through.

In reading these verses in Genesis 7, there are two main ideas that we need to take out of this first mention of a storm. First, it was the most *lethal* weather event in history. In the first one that we see, we find that *millions* of people died in this storm. Every human, land animal, creeping thing, and bird died. God is very specific when He tells us of all the things that died; obviously a lot of the vegetation died as well. The only things that survived were those things that survived in water.

Except for the eight people and the animals on the ark, all humans, land animals, creeping thing, and birds died. That should give us a clue about how God wants us to look at these storms. It is not just the Flood; it is any great storm. It was a means of taking life. It was lethal. It was very powerful, and it was deadly. It was a catastrophic loss of life.

The second thing that we need to take out of this is that the Bible is very clear in several places in Genesis 6-9 that this event was not normal. It was not natural. This massive, global storm resulting in the Flood was directly caused by God. He specifically says that in chapter 7 verse 4.

Genesis 7:4 For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights

He is very clear. He was the main actor in all that. He pushed the button. He made it all happen. What we can say then, was that the great Flood was the ultimate act of God. Even the insurance people call these things “Acts of God”; they are natural occurrences. For our purposes right now, we have to understand that even though God used “natural means” it was by no means natural. It was outside of nature that this occurred because God took a hand in it and caused it to happen.

We can see that these two points (the lethality and the act of God) are connected. God *caused* this worldwide storm to accomplish this great destruction and loss of life. Those are the two things: God caused it and He caused it *in order* to kill large amounts of people; all but eight. The storm was His means of executing all mankind. It was not just an act of God; it was an act of judgment, and He used a great storm which turned into the Flood as His means of doing so. He was clearing the decks, as it were, to start over again.

Go back to Genesis 6. He lays it out there for us to see, He does not pull any punches,

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He wants us to know from the very beginning what is going to happen and why.

Genesis 6:5-7 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

We can see in this first observation of a great storm, we have these two points: It took a great deal of human life, and God started it and controlled it. This should make us starkly aware of the fact the God will use great storms, whirlwinds, and hurricanes to punish and sometimes execute lethal judgment on sinful people. This is the first instance; we are immediately introduced to the fact that God will use His creation as a means of judgment.

On the other hand, we should also realize that storms are natural weather events; not all of them, but most of them are natural events. They will happen when the conditions are right for them to form. We have meteorologists who can show you how pressure and temperature combine and cause rotation in a great storm that has a tornado in it. They know how it works; they understand the mechanics of it, and they know that those storms do occur naturally. Sometimes, a storm is just a storm but God is Creator and when He desires, He can override nature and make storms do His bidding to express His displeasure on the wickedness of man.

The first mention of a storm in Scripture is a warning: God is in control. Do not get complacent about nature. Do not think that you can just do whatever you want to do and think that you can just ignore God. Do not think that we can make a paradise of man by our own intelligence or by using science to create our own utopia. God says, "Uh, uh, uh; I'm in control here." We are warned in Genesis 6, 7, 8, and 9 that God *did* intervene in human affairs one time and wiped everyone out for these reasons.

We have to have a mature understanding of these things so I will say this again. Most storms are just storms; natural storms. But, there are times when God *will* use a storm to let His will be known.

Let us go to Job 36. This is a really interesting section; it is part of Elihu's long speech to Job. Remember, Elihu is the younger man who had waited until his three supposed friends had said their piece. He then goes into this speech and exposes Job's self-

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righteousness very neatly and tries to show Job that God is so much greater, wiser, more powerful, and just than Job had given Him credit for. He said, "Job, you're not seeing God as He really is; you're thinking that He's just like you and that's a lethal way of thinking."

In this passage, we are going to start in verse 26 and we will then go into chapter 37. In this passage, Elihu uses God's control over weather to make Job think about how far beyond man God is. Later, God picks up on this in chapter 38 when He speaks to Job out of a whirlwind (almost personifying the very thing that Elihu was talking about) and He then goes on to say to Job, "Where were you when I did this?" He picks up on that theme in saying, "Look what I've done. How do you compare, Job?"

Job 36:26-37:13 Behold, God is great, and we do not know Him; nor can the number of His years be discovered. For He draws up drops of water, which distill as rain from the mist, which the clouds drop down and pour abundantly on man. Indeed, can anyone understand the spreading of clouds, the thunder from His canopy? Look, He scatters His light upon it, and covers the depths of the sea. For by these He judges the peoples; He gives food in abundance. He covers His hands with lightning, and commands it to strike. His thunder declares it, the cattle also, concerning the rising storm. At this also my heart trembles, and leaps from its place. Hear attentively the thunder of His voice, and the rumbling that comes from His mouth. He sends it forth under the whole heaven, His lightning to the ends of the earth. After it a voice roars; He thunders with His majestic voice, and He does not restrain them when His voice is heard. God thunders marvelously with His voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend. For He says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth'; likewise to the gentle rain and the heavy rain of His strength. He seals the hand of every man, that all men may know His work. The beasts go into dens, and remain in their lairs. From the chamber of the south comes the whirlwind and cold from the scattering winds of the north. By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen. Also with moisture He saturates the thick clouds; He scatters His bright clouds. And they swirl about, being turned by His guidance, that they may do whatever He commands them on the face of the whole earth. He causes it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy.

Elihu gives us a broad explanation of God's sovereign control over the weather. A couple of times, he mentions that God uses weather to judge the people but it is not always destructive because Elihu also says that God uses it to bless His land.

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Sometimes He uses weather to extend mercy. From what Elihu has told us, we can understand that God is in complete control and He can use weather however He likes. It is to the point where God can say, "Snow, be on the earth" and it happens. Or, He could send a gentle rain or He could send a heavy rain. It comes down to His will on the matter.

Let us add something to this. The last few psalms are all praise psalms to God; they end with a great crescendo of praise. Psalm 148 is one of those and storms like this are mentioned in this particular instance.

Psalm 148:7-8 Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word.

Hmm, that is interesting. He tells nature to praise Him but He says it praises Him because it fulfills His Word. You have to understand where the psalmist is coming from in terms of fulfilling His Word. Let us go to Isaiah 55 and we will see in what way they fulfill God's Word.

When we think of God's Word being fulfilled, we often think of prophesy being fulfilled. But, I believe what he is really talking about is right here because in the same way, it is described here.

Isaiah 55:10-11 For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

What the psalmist is here is that nature (in this case he is talking about fire, hail, clouds, and stormy wind) does His bidding. They fulfill His Word. If the word goes out that there is going to be a storm over Joplin, Missouri, nature obeys. It fulfills His Word; He is in complete control.

Let us go to Nahum because the prophet here compares God's wrath on His enemies in terms of God in a whirlwind.

Nahum 1:2-3 God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves

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wrath for His enemies; the Lord is slow to anger and great in power and will not at all acquit the wicked.

It is good that He is slow to anger because He has such power. He does not get angry too fast. He is limitless in power, and He is just.

Nahum 1:3-8 The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, and the flower of Lebanon wilts. The mountains quake before Him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, yes, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him. But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end of its place, and darkness will pursue His enemies.

That takes you back to Genesis. Here in these three places, we get a complete understanding of God's complete control over nature and that He will come like a whirlwind when He wills—when His anger has come to its breaking point to punish His enemies, the wicked, and to give proper judgment.

To wrap all this up, we can conclude that God is in absolute control of the weather. He is the Sovereign Lord of His creation. Nothing occurs on the earth without His knowledge so, in terms of windstorms, (hurricanes and tornadoes) He either caused it or He allows it to happen naturally. Like I said before, we should not assume that a particular storm, even a deadly one, is God's punishment of terrible sinners. We have to be a bit more discerning than that.

Were the people who died in Tuscaloosa, Alabama the scum of the earth? Were the people of Joplin cursing God, trading in slaves, or sacrificing their children to Baal? I do not think so; I do not know so. Jesus actually talks about something like this in Luke 13. Sometimes a storm is just a storm. Other times God has a hand in it but at all times, He knows what is going on.

Luke 13:1-5 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans

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were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

There were two catastrophes. People died! Were these people such horrible sinners that God *caused* Pilate to slay them? Did God *cause* the tower of Siloam to fall on those 18 and kill them because they were such terrible sinners? Jesus says no. I think His teaching is clear: He wants us to understand that we are *all* sinners. We are *all* worthy of deaths like this. We have all put ourselves under judgment by sin. We could be justly killed at any time for our sins, and we would deserve it!

The obvious teaching here is: Repent! Turn around! Seek forgiveness for your sins! Change! Be converted! Live right; be righteous! Or otherwise, we are going to perish. We are going to die under judgment. Do we really want that?

We should not assume that some were killed because of grievous sin and we were spared because of righteousness. That is usually not how it works. God has His reasons for why some die and others live but the thing we have to take away from all of this is “Except by the grace of God, go I” and use it as a prod to change, to confess our sins to God, and to take strides to overcome. We should instead praise and thank God for His mercy and use the tragedy as impetus to turn to God and to intensify our relationship with Him.

That is exactly where He goes in the very next section; it is the parable of the barren fig tree. The one where the fig tree is not producing and the keeper of the vineyard says, “Hey, it’s not producing, why don’t you cut it down?” But God says to fertilize around it to see if it will produce fruit. Then, it says in verse 9 that if it bears fruit it is good and if not, after that, *then* you can cut it down. I thought it was very interesting that Jesus was careful to leave the threat of being cut down in the story.

It is not just that He will come in and do His part because He will. He will come and dig around us and fertilize us and do what He needs to do to get us to change and produce fruit, but we have the responsibility to actually produce fruit. He will help us all He can and that is a great deal of help. He leaves that stick in there to prod us, to tell us that, in time, we are going to be judged.

In I Peter 4:17, the apostle tells us that judgment is now on the house of God. This is

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where things get a little bit different from what happened there in Siloam and in the other one with Pilate killing those few. They were not converted people. As far as I know, none of the people who have died were members of the church of God. Their deaths, in terms of eternity, are tragic but it is not the end. They will rise in the second resurrection and have a real chance at salvation which they probably did not have in this life. But if it were us, that would be the end of our period of judgment. And it would be a judgment if God allowed us to die in one of these things. We just have to ask, "What kind of judgment?"

Was it a judgment of salvation and glorification in the resurrection, or is it a judgment of condemnation? For us, these things are quite a bit more personal and poignant; it means a lot more to us and that is how we should take it. We should take it as a warning from God that things are not right in this country; we cannot do anything about this country but we *can* do something about ourselves. We can do what Jesus tells us, "I tell you no but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

We use this type of tragedy as a prod to get our own houses in order whether the end is coming next week or not. The timing does not matter; the warning and our response to it is what matters. What will we do as a result? This is how I believe we should react to these storms: We should use it for personal, spiritual growth. We should take the warning. We should understand that God is there. He is watching. He is watching this country, He is watching us, He is seeing the way things are going, and it is clear (from what we see and from the reaction of the weather), that He is not pleased.

Like I said, these more than 500 deaths are 10 times normal; that must mean something. We need to take it personally and, if for some reason you should die in an accident or from natural causes, be prepared for eternal life if the end were to come tomorrow. In the remaining time, I want to look at storms and whirlwinds from a prophetic angle.

Does the increase of killer storms signify the time of the end? Are these storms reliable signs of Christ's imminent return? I want to go through a little bit of scripture to see how storms are treated in the prophetic sense. Let us go and read Mark's account of the Olivet prophesy in Mark 13. We will not read all of this but I want to hit the highlights so we get the main flow of things.

Mark 13:3-4 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

Notice Jesus' response.

Mark 13:5-8 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.

Mark 13:14 "So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Mark 13:18-20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter. For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

Mark 13:24-27 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

We have often said that the Olivet prophesy is the key to prophesy; especially prophesy concerning the time of the end. Did you notice, as we were going through there, killer storms, whirlwinds, tornadoes, and hurricanes are absent from this list of signs of sorrows that portent the coming of the end? Perhaps we could say that weather phenomena are not top tier signs of the end because weather happens all the time. You cannot get away from it. These storms, even hurricanes and tornadoes, are natural and they happen all the time in various places. Sometimes a storm is just a storm.

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The seals, as Jesus goes through them in verses 5-8, are false religion, war, famine, pestilence and death, martyrdom, and there are heavenly signs preceded by a great earthquake. Perhaps there is a storm in this but none is directly mentioned. We could say that weather events will be responsible for pestilence and thus for famine but it does not directly say. Famine can be caused many ways, often because of humans by war, economics, and things like that.

What I am getting at is that these weather events (hurricanes and tornadoes) are not shown to be major signs in themselves. They are ancillary to everything; they might be there, they might be involved, but they are not top tier signs. Top tier signs are things like: deception, war, famine, pestilence, and the other things that He mentions.

If we go further, in the book of Revelation we have the trumpet plagues which are: the vegetation burn, sea creatures dying, fresh water becoming bitter, heavenly bodies darkened, the great army of the Beast, and the 200 million man army from the east. Even though there are heavenly bodies being darkened, maybe by clouds or storms, no *lethal* storms are directly mentioned.

When we get to Revelation 11, we can see that the Two Witnesses have the power to close up heaven and to cause great drought on the earth so that no rain falls during their ministry. It does not seem that sending tornadoes or hurricanes is part of the power that they are given. It is not mentioned; it is also not a power of the false prophet. The false prophet is given power to deceive a lot of people but in terms of windstorms, it is not mentioned.

Finally, when we get to the seven last plagues, we have great sores coming upon men, the sea turning to blood, the rivers and seas turning to blood, men being scorched with fire, darkness and pain coming upon men, the Euphrates being dried up, and a great, massive earthquake at the very end. It is here, in the seventh vial or bowl of God's wrath that we have any indication of a great storm.

Revelation 16:17-21 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone

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about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

Here we have huge hailstones ranging around 100 pounds each and thundering and lightning; it is obvious that we have a terrible storm along with this earthquake but we need to notice the timing. This is basically the last thing to occur; this is the last plague when there is a voice from heaven saying, "It is done." We are talking about the end of the Day of the Lord. We get a sign of the times in terms of great storms at the very end. I think we are going to have a good idea of where we are concerning Christ's return when this great storm occurs.

This is my point: God *will* use great storms as a rod of judgment but they are not necessarily biblical signs of the end until you get to this part at the very end. However, we can say that their increase in number and their increase in lethality can be seen as an indication that God is intensifying His warning to the church and to Israel. They are not truly signs of the end but how they are happening shows us that things are intensifying; we need to get ready, and react to them as shown a few minutes ago.

You may want to jot down Isaiah 28:1-3 because this is one place where it says that a storm comes and destroys Ephraim or Israel. In this case, it is described as a storm but God or the prophet there really means an army. He is using the imagery of a storm to describe the army of Assyria as it comes down on Israel. This also happens in Ezekiel 38:9, where the army of Gog and Magog is described as descending like a storm; covering the land like a cloud. When we study prophecy and see these images, sometimes we need to remember that a storm is not a storm at all but it is just describing an army. We need to be careful in reading these things and figuring them out.

I want to go to Jeremiah 23 because I think this is very interesting and may give us a clue as to what God is warning us about as these storms intensify.

Jeremiah 23:9-20 My heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake. I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the Lord, and because of His holy words. For the land is full of adulterers; for because of a curse the land mourns. The pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up. Their course of life is evil, and their might is not right. "For both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My house I have found their wickedness," says the Lord. "Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery ways; in the darkness they shall be driven on and fall in

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them; for I will bring disaster on them, the year of their punishment,” says the Lord. “And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria: They prophesied by Baal and caused My people Israel to err. Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; they also strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns back from his wickedness. All of them are like Sodom to Me, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah. “Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: ‘Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall; for from the prophets of Jerusalem profaneness has gone out into all the land.’” Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord. They continually say to those who despise Me, ‘The Lord has said, “You shall have peace”’; and to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, ‘No evil shall come upon you.’” For who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, and has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it? Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury—a violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.

Ezekiel 13:1-14 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, ‘Hear the word of the Lord!’” Thus says the Lord God: “Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! O Israel, your prophets are like foxes in the deserts. You have not gone up into the gaps to build a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the Lord. They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord!’ But the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope that the word may be confirmed. Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you not spoken false divination? You say, ‘The Lord says,’ but I have not spoken.” Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you,” says the Lord God. “My hand will be against the prophets who envision futility and who divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord God. “Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace—and one builds a wall, and they plaster it with untempered

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mortar— say to those who plaster it with untempered mortar, that it will fall. There will be flooding rain, and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it down. Surely, when the wall has fallen, will it not be said to you, ‘Where is the mortar with which you plastered it?’” Therefore thus says the Lord God: “I will cause a stormy wind to break forth in My fury; and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger, and great hailstones in fury to consume it. So I will break down the wall you have plastered with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

Interesting; two prophets, two prophecies, to the priests and the prophets and to these two groups, God sends a violent whirlwind, a stormy wind, flooding rain, and hail as a direct judgment on the prophets and the priests who preach falsely. Who do not practice what they preach, who lead people astray, who hinder the people from repenting, who say that there is no punishment from sin, who cover over the deep rents in the fabric of society because of sin, who denigrate the idea that God is warning us that His judgment is coming and so forth!

Could these devastating, spring storms have been a major warning not to the people but to the ministers and priests of this nation? That is what we see in these prophecies. God says, “You haven’t done your job. As a matter of fact, you’ve done a terrible wrong against the people because you’ve prophesied out of your own head. You’ve told them things that aren’t true. You’ve allowed them to go astray by not teaching them the truth.”

Has God tried to wake up the clergy of this nation in these storms? Is He trying to shake them up out of their complacency to get them to preach the true value; to get them to realize that He is there and watching and judging? We cannot be sure. It is interesting that two prophecies in the Major Prophets (Jeremiah and Ezekiel) are prophecies of this nature where whirlwinds are the punishment.

Mark 4:35-39 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us cross over to the other side.” Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace, be still!” And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

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To us, our God is a refuge from the storm. If we have faith in Him and we follow His commands, we can sail confidently through these turbulent times knowing that the full force of God's power is with us to the end.