

Session 3 Overview of the Signs of the Times

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Many today neglect the subject of the biblical signs of the times despite many Scriptures that emphasize how important these signs are. Jesus, more than any of the apostles, emphasized the need to discern the times (Mt. 16:1-4; 24:32-44; Lk. 19:41-44; 21:34-36). He strongly rebuked those who did not pay attention to the prophetic signs that pointed to His first coming.
- B. Jesus, the apostles, and the Old Testament prophets prophesied both event and trend signs. Over 150 biblical chapters in the Scripture have God's end-time plan as the main subject. When we combine the prophecies in these chapters we get a fuller picture of biblical signs of the times.
- C. *“Never before in history have all factors been present for fulfillment of prophecy relating to end-time trends and events. Only in our generation have combined revival of Israel, formation of world church, increasing power of Muslim religion, rise of occult, worldwide spread of atheism as dramatic setting for fulfillment of prophecy. The road to Armageddon is prepared. The advent of globalism and technologies linking communications and cash systems, the growing spiritual apostasy worldwide, with longing for leader who can unite diverse religious and political factions are setting stage for Antichrist one-world government.” John Walvoord, Israel in Prophecy (p. 129)*
- D. When studying the signs of the times, it is important to acknowledge that in the past few decades there have been poorly timed applications of various signs related to current events. Some past studies have been sloppy, imprecise, and lacking credible connections to Scripture, yet we should acknowledge the courage with which these bold voices served their generation by exploring a topic so often ignored by the Body of Christ. We must learn from past errors and pursue understanding of the signs of the times in a manner that is scripturally precise and responsible.

II. THREE CATEGORIES OF SIGNS

- A. Three main categories of the signs of the times—sign events, sign trends, and cosmic signs.
 - 1. ***Sign events***: These are actual events predicted in Scripture that alert us to the timing of Jesus' return. They include political, spiritual, economic, and religious events, such as the rebirth of the state of Israel, the future 10-nation confederation, the abomination of desolation, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, etc. Sign events are the most faith-building.
 - 2. ***Sign trends***: Both positive and negative sign trends signal the generation of Jesus' return. Examples of positive trends are the gospel being preached in all nations, the global prayer movement, and the Church walking in power, purity, and unity, and standing with Israel even in persecution. Negative trends include an increase of escalating violence, famines, and persecution of the saints, and the falling away. Trends are not as overt or faith-building as sign events, because the way they occur is not as clearly defined as a dramatic event.
 - 3. ***Cosmic signs***: There will be dramatic signs in the heavens that will cause many to fear.

¹¹*“There will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.” (Lk. 21:11)*

III. JESUS IDENTIFIED 12 NEGATIVE SIGN TRENDS

- A. Jesus gave **12 negative sign trends** that will bring distress to the nations and indicate the generation of His return (Mt. 24:4-14; Lk. 21:11, 25). Matthew described nine; Luke added three more. These trends include **deception** by false christs/prophets (Mt. 24:4-5, 11, 24), **ethnic conflict** (Mt. 24:7), **economic warfare** (Mt. 24:7), **famines, pestilences, and earthquakes** (Mt. 24:8), **hatred of believers** (Mt. 24:9), **relational breakdown** in society (Mt. 24:10), **lawlessness**, or an increase in sin and rebellion (Mt. 24:12), **fearful sights** (Lk. 21:11), great signs in the **sky** (affecting the sun, moon, and stars) and disturbances in the **sea** (Lk. 21:11, 25).

⁵**“Many will come...saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many...⁷For nation will rise against nation [Gk. ethnos, or ethnic conflict], and kingdom against kingdom [economic warfare]. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places...⁹and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. ¹⁰And then many will...hate one another...¹²And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” (Mt. 24:4-12)**

¹¹**“There will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven...²⁵in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring...” (Lk. 21:11, 25)**

- B. Some of these trends have always existed, but in the end times they will have a distinct intensity that will make global headline news; they will constitute a prophetic sign with a message from the Lord that can be discerned by the Body of Christ worldwide. Now, for the first time, most of these trends and the developments leading to all the sign events are happening on a global basis.

IV. SIGN EVENTS AND TRENDS RELATED TO ISRAEL

- A. The most striking events in biblical prophecy are the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland to reestablish the **state of Israel** and to gain control of **Jerusalem** (Ezek. 38:8; Joel 3:2, 12; Zech. 12:3, 6; 14:2; Lk. 21:24). Israel became a nation on May 14, 1948, and then gained control of Jerusalem in the Six-Day War (June 1967). No prophetic sign is more dramatic or convincing. The Jews were scattered to the nations in AD 70. Now, 2,000 years later, they are back home.

⁸**“In the latter years you [Antichrist] will come into the land of those [Israel]...gathered from many people [nations] on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate.” (Ezek. 38:8)**

⁶**“In that day...Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place—Jerusalem.” (Zech. 12:6)**

- B. The **rebuilt temple** in Jerusalem, with sacrifices according to the OT law, is to be a sign (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14; 2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 11:1-2; 13:12-18; cf. Dan. 9:26-27; 11:31; 12:11). The temple was destroyed in AD 70. Orthodox Jews are leading a new, strong movement to rebuild the temple.

- C. **Salvation of Israel:** Messianic Jewish congregations are seeing more Jewish people in Israel come to Jesus than at any time since the first century. There are 120+ Messianic congregations in Israel, totaling more than 12,000 believers. This is an increase of over 500% in the last 10 years.

³⁹**“You shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Mt. 23:39)**

- D. Jerusalem as *center of world politics and controversy*: The prophets foretold that Jerusalem would be the focus of the whole earth (Zech. 12:3; 14:1-3; cf. Joel 3:2, 12; Zeph. 3:8; Lk. 21:20-24).
²I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken...Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant...shall not be cut off from the city. (Zech. 14:2)
- E. Two conflicting trends: anti-Semitism in the nations; love for Israel in the Body of Christ. Many Jews and Gentiles will go into prison camps under the Antichrist's reign of terror. Jesus will deliver Israel and require the Church to stand with Israel in their time of trouble, like Corrie ten Boom's family did during World War II. This is one way the Church will provoke Israel to jealousy.
²⁴"They [Israel] will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Lk. 21:24)
⁶"I will...give You [Jesus] as a covenant to the people [Israel]...⁷to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house..."²²But this [Israel] is a people robbed and plundered; all of them are snared in holes, and they are hidden in prison houses." (Isa. 42:6-7, 22)
¹¹But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. (Rom. 11:11)

V. SIGN TRENDS RELATED TO THE NATIONS

- A. ***Global government***: A Middle East/European superstate (revived Roman Empire) will emerge, with a 10-nation confederation under the Antichrist (Dan. 2:41-42; 7:7, 20, 24; Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12-13, 16). The most challenging issues facing the nations are international in nature, including the ***global war on terror*** and the ***global financial crisis***. The tension in the financial crisis is that we have global financial markets without global rule of law. The crisis will create an atmosphere in which "global governance" will be a more attractive option for finding solutions.
- B. ***Globalization***: Financial institutions, commerce, communication, and geopolitics are shifting from being nation based to a globally unified expression (Rev. 17-18). There will be one-world political cooperation, technology, economics, etc. Government, commerce, and religions will pool resources.
- C. ***Knowledge and travel***: Daniel prophesied a great increase of knowledge (communication) and travel (transportation) as many "run to and fro." It is estimated that global tourism will generate \$5 trillion annually by 2020. Currently, the total knowledge possessed by humans doubles annually.
⁴"Seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro [unprecedented travel], and knowledge shall increase [information age]." (Dan. 12:4)
- D. ***Internet technology*** has allowed knowledge to greatly increase. The ability of the Antichrist's government to enforce the mark of the Beast system worldwide (Rev. 13:16-18) implies the existence of modern technology, a cashless society, and a one-world economic system.
¹⁶He causes all...to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,¹⁷ and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast. (Rev. 13:16-17)

VI. POSITIVE SIGN TRENDS

- A. **Gospel preached to all nations:** Jesus connected the timing of His return to the preaching of the gospel to all nations (12,000 people groups). Leading mission leaders project that the gospel will be preached to every people group by 2020. The greatest harvest of souls in history is occurring now. The Bible has been translated into 2,000+ languages (used by 98% of the world's population).
¹⁴***“This gospel...will be preached...to all the nations [ethnos] and then the end will come.”***
(Mt. 24:14)
- B. **Bridal identity:** John connected Jesus' return to the Church understanding her bridal identity. This is occurring in a global way for the first time in history (Rev. 22:17; cf. Mt. 25:1-13).
¹⁷***The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!”*** (Rev. 22:17)
- C. **Global prayer and worship movement:** The Spirit is raising up a prayer and worship movement (Rev. 22:17; 8:4; cf. Lk. 18:7-8; Isa. 62:6-7; 24:14-16; 25:9; 26:8-9; 27:2-5, 13; 30:18-19; 42:10-13; 51:11; 52:8; Joel 2:12-17, 32; Mic. 5:3-4; Zeph. 2:1-3; Ps. 102:17-20; 122:6; Zech. 12:10). Isaiah prophesied 24/7 prayer ministries continuing until Jesus returns (Isa. 62:6-7). Only one generation will see the fulfillment of God's promise to “set” watchmen (intercessors) in place to cry out 24/7 until Jerusalem becomes a praise in the earth (which will occur when Jesus returns).
⁶***I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace [be silent, NASB] day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He...makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth [at the second coming].*** (Isa. 62:6-7)
- D. **Outpouring of the Spirit:** The Lord promised to pour out His Spirit on all believers (Acts 2:17-21). The increase of the number of believers with “charismatic” theology and experience has grown from *one million* (1920) to *60 million* (1970) to over *600 million* today—this is a sign of the times.

VII. NEGATIVE SIGN TRENDS

- A. **Harlot Babylon worldwide religion** (Rev. 17:2-6): The harlot Babylon religion of tolerance will be characterized by moral relativity without absolutes and religious pluralism with syncretism.
- B. **Lawlessness abounds:** Sin will reach its fullest expression (Mt. 24:12; Rev. 14:18; cf. Dan. 8:23).
1. **Violence (days of Noah):** There are 50 million abortions worldwide each year (over 100,000 per day). The abortion pill will cause this number to increase greatly. There are 35 million slaves (human trafficking), and the number is growing by 5 million per year (Rev. 18:13).
 2. **Immorality (days of Lot):** Immorality will increase greatly in the end times (Rev. 9:21; 14:8; 17:1-4; 18:2-4, 9-10; 19:2). Over \$100 billion is spent each year on pornography worldwide, with nearly 5 million pornographic websites that consist of over 500 million pages. Holograms and virtual reality will enable people to experience even more sexual perversion. Paul prophesied that marriage would be forbidden, or outlawed, in some places (1 Tim. 4:3).
¹***The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits...³forbidding to marry.*** (1 Tim. 4:1-3)