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SIGNS

Everywhere Signs

I remember 1971, the year Diane and I were married, there was this hit song called "Signs" by the "Five Man Electrical Band" with these catchy lyrics:

*Sign, sign
Everywhere sign
Blockin' out the scenery
Breakin' my mind
Do this, don't do that
Can't you read the sign*

I think most of you in my age bracket are familiar with the song. Yes, signs are a part of everyday life: they tell us where to go, what to do and how to behave. Signs are designed to inform us so we have time to make choices. In order for a sign to exist, someone had to have the foresight to warn or inform those who follow. For example, you are driving a car down the highway and the bridge is out ahead. If you ignore the warning about the bridge, you put yourself in danger. The more we know, the better we are able to prepare. Signs are beneficial to us only if we act on them.

As an example: Two thousand years ago, Jesus warned the Pharisees about their failure to recognize signs, and in the process, they crucified Jesus. Thirty seven years later Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed.

Doomsday Signs

We have probably all seen cartoons of people wearing or holding

placards proclaiming "The end is near!" Well, let me assure you that according to Scripture, the earth will still be around for a thousand years after Christ's second coming (Revelation 20-22).

Doomsday prophets talk about the "end of the world." Pick a year – any year – and probably somebody somewhere would have predicted it for the "end of the world." Some may base their predictions on Nostradamus or the Mayans or tea leaves or crop circles. But many say they base their predictions on the Bible.

There is a whole field of biblical study known technically as eschatology, the study of "last" things, of prophecies of the "end time" and beyond. But not everyone who studies end time Bible prophecy sets specific dates or walks around shouting or talking to themselves.

Some predicting the "end of the world" base their terminology on the Old King James Version's translation of verses like Matthew 24:3, where the disciples asked Jesus, *"Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"*

End of an age, not the world

When Jesus' disciples asked about "the end of the world," they weren't talking about the "world" in the sense of our physical planet, Earth. The word translated "end" is from the Greek *sunteleleia*, "a bringing to completion together" (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1985, "end, ending"). Vine's goes on to say that "end of the world" is misleading, that "consummation of the age" is more like it. The word does not denote a termination, but the leading up of events to the appointed climax. The New King James Version and many other modern bible versions clear up Matthew 24:3, where the disciples were asking about the "end of the age," not "end of the world."

So, Jesus wasn't talking about our physical planet being totally destroyed or blown up nor the end of man's civilization. He was specifically talking about the time of man's wayward self-rule and of a time when the course of human history and man's government on earth for the last 6000 years shall come to an end.

Six thousand years ago Adam and Eve fell from grace when they were deceived by Satan and disobeyed God. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden of Eden and the rulership of planet earth went from Adam to Satan. The apostle Paul says that *"the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5:19),"* and that Satan is effectively *"the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4)."* Later on Paul goes on to add, the age *"which is to come (Ephesians 1:21),"* begins with Christ's return to establish His kingdom on earth. The symbolism of Daniel 2:34 and 2:44 depicts Christ's return and the setting up of God's all-powerful world ruling government. This supplants all the humanly devised governments of mankind over the past 6000 years.

Scripture spells out that our present age – of civilization and society as we know it today – will terminate in unimaginable destruction and violence that will climax at the end of the age just before Christ's return. In the New Testament alone, more than 300 verses refer to these events.

Paul and the other apostles understood that at the end of this age, man's corrupt civilization will be swept away, and a new era will then dawn. Can we know the signs that will lead up to the time of the end of this age? What are those signs that will signal the end of man's rule under Satan's influence?

It is not a question of whether or not man's corrupt civilization will end. God's Word says it will. Our biggest concern shouldn't be when it will end. Instead, our main focus should be to seek God and be prepared spiritually for the times that are coming (Luke 21:36).

God wants us to understand and be able to interpret the signs of the times. Never was that ability more important than today. Many people are confused and troubled by things they read about and see happening all around them. They are apprehensive about the future. Repeatedly they ask, "What's going on? Why does everything seem to be out of control? Where is the old sense of stability?" How can we discern the significance of the events and the trends we see developing in the world today?

Even though we don't know exactly when the end of this age will come, we must be ready. The good news is; it's not really the end. It's the beginning of a much better world! Be sure to read chapter 8 of

this book to learn more about the Kingdom of God and how you may enter it.

Prophetic signs

Is there any relationship between the events of which we read, hear, and see in the daily news and biblical prophecy? Yes! Just as when we are travelling and see signs besides the highway telling us what to expect on the road ahead, the Bible provides signs of the times that point to specific events in the future.

The Bible gives many examples of signs that should warn us of the coming end of this the church age which started nearly 2000 years ago after Christ's resurrection. While we are also told we will not know the time of the end, the exact hour or day; God obviously wants us to know when that time is getting near. When that season is upon us. God gave us His prophetic Word, so that we could watch and know. Over 26% of the Bible is dedicated to prophecy. God obviously wanted us to know His plan for the future.

Unfortunately, many Christians take the verses that tell us we won't know the exact time or day of His coming to mean they should ignore any and all Scripture that might warn us of this time of tribulation. Others have fallen into the trap of fearing to be labelled the "conspiracy theorist" should they display an interest in the Biblical prophecies about our future on earth. My philosophy is simple: God included it in the Bible and, since God is all-knowing, we should trust that it is something we should know and study along with the rest of His Word.

When Christ was here, almost 2000 years ago, He chastised the religious leaders of His day for their ignorance of the prophetic Scriptures. Why did He rebuke those first century Jewish leaders? Because they were eyewitnesses to the fulfilment of literally hundreds of Old Testament prophecies concerning the First Coming of Christ but they were unable or perhaps unwilling to discern the signs of their times!

I can't think of anything more preposterous than the suggestion that God wants us to be in the dark when it comes to His prophetic agenda for the future. If it were so, why did He give us so many prophetic

indicators in His Word? And why are the Scriptures so precise when it comes to the chronology of prophetic events? The apostle Paul told the believers at Thessalonica that he did not want them *"to be ignorant"* concerning the **Rapture** and other related end-time events (1 Thess. 4:13).

There are at least 450 prophetic signs given in the Old Testament Scriptures. Most of these signs centre around two major events in history: the First Coming of Christ Jesus, 2000 years ago; and the Second Coming of Christ Jesus and other related events. Of the 450 prophetic signs God gave the Jews concerning the coming of Christ Jesus, 196 were fulfilled when He came the first time at Bethlehem. That means there are over 250 signs given for His second coming – which still remains to be fulfilled!

So, if Christ held those first century Jews responsible for their failure to discern the signs of the times in their day, how much more responsible are we for discerning the signs of the times in our day? God wants us to be equipped with the knowledge and discernment necessary to be able to recognize the signs of the times.

Ignorance of God's prophetic outline and failure to know God's program for the Church, the nations, and Israel is the cause of the overwhelming amount of error and misunderstanding of the events of the future. That's why God has given us the prophetic Scriptures for precisely that purpose. We have, as the apostle Peter says, *"The prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place (2 Peter 1:19)."* In that "prophetic word made more sure", God tells us what will take place on earth after Christ completely removes His true church.

The signs of our times were only possible to understand since May 1948 with the rebirth of Israel. Before 1948 it was not possible to know that we were living in the end times. After **June 11, 1967**, when the Israeli forces recaptured the city of Jerusalem in the Six-Day War, God's prophetic clock started ticking loudly. The nation Israel is the timepiece, or the point of reference He has given us, for discerning the times of the season we live in.

You may ask, "Why is the fact that Israel was reborn as a nation in 1948 and the recapture of Jerusalem in 1967 an important event to the

study of biblical prophecy?" Because God said that He would one day regather the children of Israel into the land promised them through His covenant with Abraham. " *Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land (Ezekiel 37:21).*" This prophetic regathering, which we have seen take place within our generation, is to serve as a sign to the world that the "Day of the Lord" draws near. Let me explain: This phrase refers to an extended period of time when God's wrath and judgement is poured upon the inhabitants of earth, beginning with the Tribulation period and including the events leading up to the Second Coming of Christ. It will begin (come) unexpectedly "as a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:1-11)." Immediately prior to the "Day of the Lord" we have the coming of Christ for His church in the air, when all believers are taken out of this world before God's wrath and judgement begins on earth.

There are no Bible prophecies to be fulfilled before the appearing of Christ to remove His true church. But after the true church is removed in the Rapture, a whole sequence of momentous events is predicted to take place in the Tribulation. The Tribulation is a future seven year period of time when God will finish His discipline of Israel and finalize His judgement on the unbelieving world. The Bible describes this period of time as the most terrible in all of human history (Matt. 24:21). The trends we see developing today are preparing the way for their fulfilment. In this book I will be examining those trends in three different spheres: the international political sphere, the economic and financial sphere and the religious sphere.

Are we living in the end times?

We are surrounded by so many obvious signs that we would have to be blind not to see them, yet some fail to recognize them when they are called to their attention. Many changes in the last 50 years have only brought further confirmation that we are indeed living in "the times of the signs." Has the time finally arrived? Now that nearly 2000 years have passed since Jesus Christ's first coming, ominous trends in the world today tell us that we indeed are presently living in the end time. Our age is replete with many disturbing signs indicating that this age of man's 6000 year government on earth is drawing to a close. Never in history have so many legitimate prophetic signs

pointed towards Christ's anticipated second coming.

Jesus compares the signs of the end to giving birth. Contractions at the beginning of labour are few and far between. However, as labour progresses, the intensity and frequency of contractions increase. So, as we get closer to Jesus' coming, the signs He gave us will increase in intensity and frequency (as evidenced by modern events). The signs Jesus gave us reveal how soon the next event will occur. The Bible may not give a specific date of when Jesus will come, but the approaching warning signs indicate how close we are.

Throughout history, God has warned people before He acts. God gave Noah and the people of his day 120 years of warning (Genesis 6:3); Lot and his family were given a warning; the Egyptians were given 10 warning signs (Exodus 5:1; 12:36); a 40 day warning to Nineveh was given (Jonah 3:4); and Jesus gave the nation of Israel a warning 37 years before her destruction (Matthew 24:1-2).

God warns His people before judgment falls and saves those who are obedient. God will do this before the start of His seven year wrath on earth called the **Tribulation**. Jesus, speaking of this horrific time said, *"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved..."* (Matthew 24:21-22). Just before this horrendous time of God's wrath on earth, He will save His body of believers (the Church) by snatching them off the planet and taking them to heaven in what is called the **Rapture**. So beware that judgment should not come as a surprise to mankind because God has revealed it in advance through His prophets (Amos 3:7).

How do we know the end is near?

We are living in the end times because what is happening now could not have happened in any other generation. Scripture tells us that before the end comes, the gospel (the good news about Jesus and His offer of salvation and eternal life) will be preached to the entire world (Matt. 24:14). The Bible also says that some time after this happens, the end will come. The Bible has been preached in certain parts of the world for a long time. But now, with the increasing worldwide availability of television, radio and the Internet, there is greater

potential for the gospel to be preached to everyone, everywhere. Peoples of the Middle East, Eastern Europe, India, China and other parts of Asia that didn't hear the gospel, or where the gospel was suppressed because of Islam, Communism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other state religions, can now hear the gospel through radio, television or Internet without fear of persecution or fear of death. Even today, if you're caught with a Bible, in Saudi Arabia and some other countries the punishment for such an offense is death. Today, a number of ministries that I support have radio satellite communication towers in the Middle East and people of the Middle East can listen to the gospel message in their own homes without the fear of death. How do we know the end is near? Jesus said, *"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 (Matt. 24:14)*. There you have it – that's how we know the end is near.

We should know the times of the season we live in

Christ was emphatic in teaching about His return. Jesus emphasized prophecy and the undertaking of it in His teachings. Jesus said, *"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy (Rev. 1:3),"* relating to the testimony and revelation of Jesus Christ and His second coming. He emphasized its importance in understanding His life and ministry. Yet, He did explain that there are some aspects of the future that cannot be discerned with precision. His return is certain, but the precise moment is not. Once the seven year Tribulation starts, it will be possible to know the approximate time of Christ's coming. Please understand that all believers will be taken up to heaven before the Tribulation starts. Only nonbelievers will be left on earth when the Tribulation period begins.

Since the Bible outlines a clear cast and scenario of players, events and nations involved in the end time Tribulation, we can see God's preparation for the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy regarding God again dealing with His people Israel (Daniel 12). For example, the fact that Israel has been re-established as a nation and now controls Jerusalem is a strong indicator that the church age is drawing to an end (Isa. 11:11, 12:6; Eze. 20:33-44, 22:17-22; Zep. 2:1-3).

Apart from a few exceptions, the church age is not a time of prophetic fulfilment. Instead, prophecy will be fulfilled after the Rapture, in

relation to God's dealing with the nation of Israel in the Tribulation. The current church age does not have a specific prophetic countdown or timetable, unlike Israel and its *70 weeks of years prophecy* (*Daniel 9:14-27*).

The church age is not characterized by historically verifiable prophetic events, except its beginning on the Day of Pentecost, which began 50 days after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2, 3), and its ending with the Rapture. The clear course of the last days for the church consists of constant warnings to the believer to be on guard against doctrinal defection, otherwise known as apostasy.

So, as we can see today, God's prophetic plan for humanity is on track and on schedule. History and current events are moving towards a finale in which God's program will be fully realized. With the return of a significant portion of the world's Jewish population to their promised land and the subsequent establishment of Israel as a nation in 1948 as prophesied 2500 years ago, God's plan is moving closer and closer to fruition. Hardly a day goes by without the media reporting on news from that tiny country in the Middle East; Israel. Such focus is as God's Word said it would be. Israel is God's super sign of the times, which makes significant many other developments and world events.