

Signs of the Times



The following notes contain some of the material presented in the series "Is God for Real?"

Every day we receive a flood of reports from around the globe, often reporting bad news or sad news of one kind or another. Is the daily news simply a series of random and meaningless events? Or could it be that they point to some climactic event just beyond our horizon? Many people today recognise the fact that our world faces some major challenges. World leaders struggle to find lasting solutions to a growing list of global issues. Things like poverty, terrorism, global warming, economic instability, environmental degradation, declining moral values, population explosion, and the list could go on and on. As we face what many people consider to be an uncertain future, is there any good news? Is there any hope beyond the pessimistic headlines? The Biblical answer to these questions is yes, absolutely.

In the Bible, Jesus identified many signs that indicated the end of the world was at hand, and how we should prepare for that time. Just before His crucifixion Jesus was walking around the temple in Jerusalem with His disciples. They drew His attention to the magnificent buildings of the temple, but Jesus' response to them was shocking to their ears. He said that not one stone would be left upon another; in other words, the temple would one day be destroyed. Jesus made this prediction in 31 AD, and sure enough nearly 40 years later in 70 AD the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. But when Jesus made this prediction, His disciples couldn't separate the destruction of Jerusalem from the end of the world and the return of Christ. Therefore, they asked, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). Christ then began to answer those questions, and most of the material can be found in Matthew 24:1-31; Mark 13:1-33 and Luke 21:5-36.

The Bible gives us signs to indicate the nearness of the end of the age. There are signs in the spiritual world, signs in the political world, signs in the natural world, signs in the social world and signs in the financial world. Just as road signs help us to know how near we are to our destination, so too, these signs help us to understand how close we are to the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ. When His followers asked about the end of the age and His return, Jesus first responded by warning them not to be deceived by **Signs in the Spiritual World**. He said there would be false christs and false prophets (Matthew 24:4-5). Have we seen this fulfilled in recent years? A number of false 'Messiahs' have emerged in the last twenty years or so from different places in the world such as the UK, Japan, USA and here in Australia. You may remember infamous names such as Jim Jones, Marshal Applewhite, David Koresh, David Ike, Shoko Assahara, Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda and Alan Miller to name a few of the more prominent ones. In addition to this the Bible states that, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons," (1Timothy 4:1). Interest in the occult and demonic practices has exploded in recent years, especially among the young, and our TV screens and movie theatres reflect this interest and continue to fuel its growth.

Jesus also warned of **Signs in the Political World**. He said there would be "wars and rumours of wars," (Matthew 24:6). The twentieth century has rightly been described as a century of war, with two world wars and countless other major and minor conflicts resulting in 180 million deaths. In this century it is estimated that there are on average 35-39 wars taking place each year. Jesus said there would be wars and rumours of wars, but He also said that in spite of this we could find peace in Him (John 16:33).

Next, He spoke of **Signs in the Natural World**, stating that there “will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places,” (Matthew 24:7). Again, we see the fulfilment of these predictions as we hear of the tragic death of 40,000 infants every day in the third world from famine, the increase in death from drug resistant bacteria, and the rise in frequency and intensity of powerful earthquakes around the globe. The Bible also predicts the time would come when men would be able to destroy the earth. Not only is this possible through nuclear warfare, but now we also see the devastating effect we humans are having on our environment by destroying natural habitats and polluting land, sea and air. The Bible predicted there would be **Signs in the Social World** too. The last days would be comparable to the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37), and the days of Lot (Luke 17:28). In Noah’s day violence and wickedness were widespread and judgement fell in the form of the great flood. Those who trusted in God found shelter in the ark and were saved. In the time of Lot sexual immorality was rampant. Lot lived in Sodom and the town had a considerable homosexual culture. God sent angels to lead Lot and his family out of Sodom before it was destroyed. Both the days of Noah and Lot are set forth as examples of what the world will be like when Jesus is about to return. Do we see these signs today?

Then there are the **Signs in the Financial World**. James 5:3-4 reads, “You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord.” This verse identifies that certain people in the last days will have become rich by exploiting cheap labour, but the first 2 verses of this chapter reveal that their riches will ultimately come to nothing. This idea is also mentioned in Revelation 18:17. Financial instability is frequently a part of our news cycle.

The Gospel Sign. Perhaps the most significant of all the signs of the times mentioned in the Bible is the one in Matthew 24:14. 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.” Notice that Jesus said when this sign has been completed then the end would come. There has never been a time in earth’s history when it has been easier to take the gospel to all the world. Through the printed page, through radio, through satellite television, through the internet and other means the gospel is indeed being preached in all the world. Notice too that the prophecy does not say that all the world would be converted and believe, but rather that the gospel would be preached as a “witness to all nations.” People will have an opportunity to respond one way or the other, and then the end will come. This prediction is also mentioned in Revelation 14:6, which says, “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.” With this sign being fulfilled around the globe at this moment then surely the return of Jesus cannot be far away! The fulfilment of any one of these signs should cause us to take notice, but seen together we must recognise that the times described in the Bible as the last days are the days in which we live today. So how should we respond? Simply say a short prayer and ask Jesus to make you ready for His return. Place your life in His hands and allow Him to guide you through these troubled times. Trust Him, and He will do just that, and He will also give you a peace of mind that passes understanding as you prepare for what lies ahead.

If you would like to know more about this subject, or others in the series, ‘Is God for Real?’ then please contact one of our staff and they will be happy to help you.