Knowing the Signs of the Times

I. THE COMMAND TO KNOW THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

A. Jesus commanded believers in the generation of His return to know that His return was near. He said that when they saw “all these things” that Scripture prophesied as signs, then they were to know with certainty that His coming was within that generation. There is only one generation in which “all these things” happen at the same time and on a global basis. Most of these things are currently accelerating together on a global basis for the first time in history. Jesus called His people to know the generation of His return, but warned that no one knows the day of His return.

33“When you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! 34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things [Jesus’ coming with the angels] take place…36 But of that day and hour no one knows…but My Father only.” (Mt. 24:33–36)

1. We must not use Matthew 24:36 to justify neglecting to study biblical prophecy. We must not use this passage in the opposite way that Jesus intended. He had just laid out the primary signs that will be given to help prepare Body of Christ for that generation.

2. In Scripture, a generation ranges from 40 to 100 years (Gen. 15:13-16; Num. 32:13; Ps. 90:10; Mt. 1:17; Acts 7:6). Moses spoke of Israel’s captivity in Egypt lasting 400 years or four generations (Gen. 15:13). Thus a generation could refer to 100 years.

B. In my opinion, we are in the early days of the generation in which Jesus will return. I believe it is possible that there are people alive today who will see His return. It may be those who are currently twenty years old or those who are two years old. I do not know with any certainty. My opinion is based on observation of the biblical signs of the times, not on personal revelation such as prophetic dreams (our faith is based on what the Bible says, not on personal revelations).

C. Jesus rebuked His generation for not being able to read the signs of His first coming.

2“You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.” (Mt. 16:2)

D. Israel’s unresponsiveness to God was related to them not knowing the time of their visitation.

43“For days will come upon you when your enemies will…surround you…44 and level you…to the ground…because you did not know the time of your visitation.” (Lk. 19:42-44)

E. Paul taught that the Church should know the times and seasons related to the Lord’s coming. The thief motif emphasizes the idea that loss could have been avoided by watching. Jesus and Paul taught the “knowability” of the generation of Jesus’ return (2 Thes. 2:1-11).

1Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night [such that the unprepared will suffer loss]…4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief…6 Therefore…let us watch and be sober. (1 Thes. 5:1-6)
II. COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

A. Misconception #1: that no one can understand end-time Scriptures or the signs of the times.

B. Misconception #2: that understanding the end times will minimize the work of the kingdom.

C. Misconception #3: since we cannot know the day of His return, we cannot know the generation.

D. Misconception #4: that every generation has believed that they were the generation in which the Lord would return. It is possible that a very small number (probably less than 1%) of believers in every generation believed this. However, only in one generation will the majority of God’s people believe in a sustained way (for decades) that they will witness Jesus’ return.

III. SIGN EVENTS AND SIGN TRENDS

A. I classify the signs of the times into two categories—sign events and sign trends. Jesus, the apostles, and the OT prophets prophesied of sign events and trends to give a clearer picture.

1. Sign events: These are actual events predicted in Scripture that alert us to the timing of Jesus’ return. These include events like the rebirth of the state of Israel, the abomination of desolation, and the revealing of the Antichrist. Sign events are the most convincing.

2. Sign trends: There are both positive and negative trends that signal the generation of Jesus’ return. An example of a positive trend is the gospel being preached in all nations (Mt. 24:14). Examples of negative trends include civil disorder and famines, etc. These are not as clear as sign events because Jesus did not clearly define how they would occur.

B. Jesus gave 12 negative sign trends that bring distress to the nations and indicate the generation of His return (Mt. 24:4-14; Lk. 21:11, 25). Matthew described nine and Luke added three more. These trends include deceit by false christs/prophets (Mt. 24:4-5, 11, 24), economic 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 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...7 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...9 and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10 And then many will...hate one another...12 And 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...25 in 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)
C. Some of these trends have always existed, but in the end times they will have a distinct intensity. They will make global headline news so as to constitute a prophetic sign that has a message from the Lord in it that can be discerned by the Body of Christ worldwide. For the first time, most of these trends and the developments leading to all the events are now happening on a global basis.

D. In my opinion, the beginning of birth pangs (Mt. 24:4-8) started either in 1948 when Israel became a nation or in 1967 when Jerusalem came under Israel’s authority. Since God’s prophetic calendar is “Jerusalem-centric,” it seems more probable that the birth pains started in 1967.

\[\text{All these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. (Mt. 24:8)}\]

E. Jesus’ most complete teaching on the end times is in Matthew 24-25 (also Mk. 13; Lk. 17; 21). Jesus prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the end of the age together in one prophecy. Some emphasize one of these two time frames at the exclusion of the other. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD parallels what will occur in the generation Jesus returns.

IV. SIGN EVENTS RELATED TO ISRAEL

A. The end-time drama in Scripture is laid out in the context of events related to Israel. Many of these prophecies are closely linked, including Israel being in the land with control of Jerusalem, worshiping in a rebuilt temple with animal sacrifices, Sabbath laws, and speaking Hebrew, etc.

B. The most striking events in biblical prophecy is the return of Jews to their ancient homeland and the reestablishing the state of Israel and gaining control over Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24, 27; Joel 3:2, 12; Zech. 12:3, 6; 14:2; Lk. 21:24). Israel became a nation on May 14, 1948, and 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 70 AD. Now, 2,000 years later, they are back home.

\[\text{8"In the latter years you [Antichrist] will come into the land of those [Israel]…gathered from many people [nations] on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate." (Ezek. 38:8)}\]

\[\text{6"In that day…Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place." (Zech. 12:6)}\]

C. The rebuilt temple in Jerusalem with sacrifices according to the laws of Moses (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14; 2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 11:1-2; 13:12-18; Dan. 9:26, 27; 11:31; 12:11). The temple has not existed since destroyed in AD 70. Today, there is a new strong movement to rebuild the temple.

D. The reestablishment of the Sabbath in the social and civil law is a sign (Mt. 24:15-20). The reestablishment of the Hebrew language. No nation in history has ever maintained its national language without a homeland for more than one generation (Zeph. 3:9)

\[\text{15“When you see the abomination of desolation…16 then let those who are in Judea flee…20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.” (Mt. 24:15-20)}\]

E. 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; Joel 3:2, 12; Zeph. 3:8; Lk. 21:20-24). The restoration of a military in Israel in the end-time is a prophetic sign (Zech. 10:5; 12:6-9).

\[\text{2I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem… (Zech. 14:2)}\]
V. SIGN TRENDS RELATED TO OTHER NATIONS

A. **World peace and safety**: the Antichrist will offer his solutions to the turmoil in the nations. The Antichrist will first be revealed as a man of peace who brings world peace (1 Thes. 5:3).

3*When they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains [Great Tribulation] upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.* (1 Thes. 5:3)

B. **Global government**: Emergence of Middle East-European superstate (revived Roman Empire) with a 10-nation confederation under the Antichrist (Dan. 2:41-42; 7:7, 20, 24; 9:26-27; Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 12, 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. Crisis creates an atmosphere so that “global governance” is a more attractive option to finding solutions.

C. **The rise of Asia**: Asia will have world leaders (China, Korea, Japan, India), with military forces in the East powerful enough to trouble the Antichrist’s mighty empire (Dan. 11:44; Rev. 16:12).

D. **Globalization**: Finances, commerce, communication, and geopolitics are shifting from nation-based to a globally unified expression (Rev. 17-18). There will be one-world technology, economics, political cooperation, travel, and info. Nations and religions will pool resources.

E. **Knowledge and travel** (Dan. 12:4): Daniel prophesied of a remarkable 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. The collective sum of all knowledge is doubling every four years. Knowledge of biological science is doubling every six months. More than 80% of all the scientists who have ever lived are alive today.

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)

F. **Instant communication**: Satellite transmission with robotics, laser technology, and instant global communication with microchip technology will facilitate a cashless society, etc. (Rev. 13:13-18).

9*Those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see [through media] their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.* (Rev. 11:9)

G. **Internet technology** has allowed knowledge to greatly increase. The embedded chip technology that accompanies the mark of the Beast has a one-world economic system with a cashless society

16*He causes all...to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast...* (Rev. 13:16-17)

H. The enforcing of the mark of the Beast worldwide (Rev. 13:16-18) implies the existence of modern technology, a cashless society, and a one-world economic system. Today’s embedded chip technology makes this possible for the first time in history. A computer chip can be implanted just beneath the skin and can easily be read by a scanning device. VeriChip offers an implantable microchip the size of a grain of rice. It costs $200 and takes 10 seconds to insert.
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. Leading mission leaders project from data 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. *Salvation of Israel*: Messianic (Jewish) congregations in Israel are seeing more Jewish people 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)

C. *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; Mt. 25:1-13).

17The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!” (Rev. 22:17)

D. *Global prayer and worship movement*: The Spirit is raising up a prayer and worship movement (Rev. 22:17; 5:8; 8:4; Lk. 18:7-8; Mt. 25:1-13; Isa. 62:6-7; 24:14-16; 25:9; 26:8-9; 27:2-5, 13; 30:18-19; 42:10-13; 43:26; 51:11; 52:8; Joel 2:12-17, 32; Jer. 31:7; Mic. 5:3-4; Zeph. 2:1-3; Ps. 102:17-20; 122:6; Zech. 12:10).

7“When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith [agreement] on the earth?” (Lk. 18:7-8)

E. Isaiah prophesied of 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 occurs when Jesus returns).

6*I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace [be silent, NAS] 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)

F. Isaiah prophesied about a global intercessory worship movement (Isa. 24:14-16; 42:10-12) that would be dynamically connected to Jesus’ return (Isa. 42:13) and His judgments (Isa. 42:14-15).

10Sing to the LORD a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth…11Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar [Saudi Arabia] inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela [Jordan] sing…13The LORD shall go forth [Jesus’ second coming] like a mighty man; He shall stir up His zeal like a man of war. (Isa. 42:10-13)
G. Amos’ prophecy linked the timing of the rebuilding of David’s tabernacle to one generation—
when Israel would be restored to her land in such a way that she would never be pulled up from it. Israel was restored to her land in May 1948—it is the only generation in which this prophecy
could be fulfilled. It signaled the beginning of the time when the spirit of the tabernacle of David
would be released—connected to the harvest of the remnant of Edom (Arabic & Islamic nations).
The Lord has planted Israel in their land three times—in Joshua’s generation (about 1400 BC),
in Zerubbabel’s generation (538 BC), and in May 1948 (the only time they will not be uprooted).

11“I will raise up the tabernacle of David… 12that they may possess the remnant of Edom
[Islam] and all the Gentiles [nations]… 14I will bring back the captives of My people Israel…
15I will plant them in their land [1948], and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land.”
(Amos 9:11-15)

H. Outpouring of the Spirit: All believers will prophesy (Act 2:17-21). The increase of the number
of Pentecostal/Charismatic believers from one million (1900) to over 500 million today is a sign.

I. Global youth focus in the kingdom: Malachi predicted that fathers in the faith would turn their
heart to the younger generation, including the fatherless (orphans, human trafficking victims).

6“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children…” (Mal. 4:5-6)

VII. NEGATIVE SIGN TRENDS

A. Harlot Babylon worldwide religion (Rev. 17:2-6): The harlot Babylon religion of tolerance will
be a counterfeit justice movement that claims to answer injustice by meeting humanitarian needs.

B. Lawlessness abounds: Sin will reach its fullest expression (Mt. 24:12; Rev. 14:18; 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 greatly increase. There are
35 million slaves (human trafficking) and the number is growing by 5 million per year
(Rev. 18:13). Violence in wars, terrorist acts and race riots, etc. is greatly increasing.
   2. Immorality (days of Lot): The biblical definition of immorality will increase greatly in
the end times (Rev. 9:21; 14:8; 17:1-4; 18:2-4, 9-10; 19:2). Close to $100 billion is spent
each year on pornography worldwide. There are nearly 5 million pornographic websites
on the internet with over 500 million pages. Same sex marriage is sweeping across the
world. Paul prophesied that marriage would be outlawed in some places (1 Tim. 4:3).

1The 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)

C. Application: We are exhorted to watch and pray ten times related to preparing for the end times
(Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:9, 33, 34, 35, 37; Lk. 21:36; 1 Thes. 5:6; Rev. 16:15). To watch is to
cultivate faith and understanding that agrees with what the Word says about Jesus’ return. We
prepare by watching what the Spirit is saying in Scripture, in circumstances, and in our life.

42Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Mt. 24:42)

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