

Signs of the Times

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Humans are interested in the future. They must plan ahead. So they check weather predictions. Economists must guess what future developments could bring about so that correct choices can be made today. How should money be invested? Futurology has become an important tool. Since people are interested in their own future as well as that of planet earth, some of them consult horoscopes, astrologers, and psychics. They plunge into spiritualism in order to find answers to pressing questions.

Jesus' disciples were also interested in future developments. When Jesus pointed to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, they asked Him when that would happen and what would be the sign of His coming. Fortunately they turned to Jesus who provides correct answers. So in Matthew 24 (Mark 13; Luke 21) Jesus pointed to signs of the times.

I. The Disciples and Their Question

- (1) The disciples asked a double question, assuming that the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming of Jesus would coincide--Matt 24:1-3.
- (2) Jesus answered to both questions simultaneously without informing them that the two events were not directly connected. Obviously He did not want to discourage them. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple took place in A.D. 70.
- (3) A closer look at the chapter allows us to see that verses 4-20 refer primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem. Verses 21-31 seem to relate specifically to the Second Coming.

II. Signs for the Destruction of Jerusalem

- (1) Signs in the political world:
Matt 24:6-7 Wars
- (2) Signs in nature:
Matt 24:7 Famines and earthquakes.
Luke 21:11 Pestilences, terrors, signs from heaven.
But these signs are just a beginning and not yet the end (Matt 24:6, 8).
- (3) Signs in the social world:
Matt 24:12 Love grows cold.
- (4) Signs in the religious world:
Matt 24:4-5 False Christs
Matt 24:9-12 Persecution, martyrdom, defection, betrayal, false prophets.
Matt 24:14 Proclamation of the gospel.

These signs were fulfilled before the destruction of Jerusalem as we know from history and the New Testament (Acts 5:36; 7:59, 8:1; 11:28; 16:26; Rom 15:23-24). Christians following Christ's advice in Matt 24:15-20 fled to Pella, and it is said that not one of them lost his or her life.

III. Signs for the Second Coming of Jesus

- (1) In a secondary sense the signs mentioned above also apply to the time before Christ's second coming. The number of wars increases. Weapons become more and more terrible and disastrous, and more and more money is spent on them. Scientists talk about an increase of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and discuss catastrophes unprecedented in magnitude. We have to fight hunger and pestilences so far unknown.
Social problems are described in Jam 5:1-8 and 2 Tim 3:1-5.

- (2) Signs in nature:
 Matt 24:29-30 Darkening of the sun and the moon, falling of the stars.
 Luke 21:25-26 Roaring of the sea, the powers of heaven are shaken.
 A fulfillment of the darkening of the sun and the moon happened May 19, 1780, when for hours extreme darkness prevailed in certain parts of the world. The greatest meteor shower known in history happened Nov. 13, 1833, fulfilling Jesus' predictions. It lasted for hours, and it is said that more than a billion shooting stars appeared.
- (3) Signs in the religious world:
 Matt. 24:23-25 False Christs and false prophets, extremely deceptive signs and miracles.
 Matt. 24:37-39 Indifference, preoccupation with the material world.
 The emphasis of Matthew 24 is clearly on the religious aspect. Here the greatest challenge for believers seems to be found.
- (4) The real sign:
 Matt 24:30 All the other events are not called "signs" by Jesus. The real sign is His coming in the sky, probably described in the second part of the verse, namely on the clouds with power and great glory.

IV. The Purpose of the Signs

- (1) Matt 24:32-33 The signs may roughly tell us that we are getting closer to the predicted event. They do not allow us to produce a time table or set a date. They call us to count on the imminent fulfillment of Christ's promise.
- (2) Matt. 24:36 Although there are signs, nevertheless only God knows the date of Christ's second coming.
- (3) Matt. 24:42 Therefore we must watch always.
- The main point of Matthew 24 is not to present a prophetic outline of future events, but to call upon God's people to stay awake and watch at all times. Then they are ready when Jesus comes.