

Signs of Jesus' Presence and the End of the Age

When Jesus' disciples asked the question, "What shall be the sign of thy presence and of the end of the age?," he proceeded to give them evidences that would enable them, and all those who would be watching, to recognize the time period of his presence at the end of this present age.

Great Tribulation

Jesus told his disciples that the end of the age would be marked by "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matthew 24:21) The prophet Daniel also described this sign which would mark the time of the end of the age: "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation..." Daniel 12:1

There has always been trouble somewhere in the world; so why is this time period described as one of great tribulation? The answer hinges on the unique time in which we live — the world is globally connected as never before in the history of mankind. What is more, man has never had the capability to totally destroy every living thing at the push of a button. There are currently about 31,000 nuclear warheads owned by eight countries. The combined explosive yield of these weapons is approximately 200,000 times greater than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Although trouble is an unavoidable reality of the end of the age, Jesus' prophecy assures us that the trouble will be shortened. (Matthew 24:22) Note also what Daniel describes as coming immediately after the trouble: "at that time thy people shall be delivered... them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake..." (Daniel 12:1,2) It is most reassuring to know that the purpose of the trouble is to prepare the earth for the incoming righteous government of God's Kingdom.

Knowledge Shall be Increased

Daniel 12 goes on to describe another sign of the end of the age: "knowledge shall be increased." (verse 4) Think of the countless inventions that have taken place in little more than 100 years: the telephone, electric light, sound recording, radio, television, modern appliances, computers, cell phones, wireless, satellites, all manner of modern appliances, and the global Internet.

Mankind has gained access to information regarding virtually any subject or product within seconds. The accumulated knowledge throughout history up to the year AD 1750 had doubled by the year 1900, a period of just 150 years. It doubled again in just 50 years by 1950, again in 10 years by 1960, and again in 8 years by 1968. Knowledge is increasing so fast that today the amount of information and statistics in the world is doubling every 18 months. IBM predicts that in the next few years, information will double every 11 hours!

Yes, Daniel's prophecy is certainly abounding in our day. This sign brings both blessings to those who use them wisely and increased trouble from those who abuse them. All of these are indications that we are on the very brink of the establishment of God's Kingdom!

The Lesson of The Fig Tree

In Matthew 24:32-34, Jesus gave another very important sign. "Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

Throughout the Bible we learn that the fig tree represents the Nation of Israel (Jeremiah 24:1-10; 29:17-23; Luke 13:6-9). Leaves sprouting on a tree are an evidence that the tree has sprung to life after a dormant winter. Jesus was actually telling us that when we see Israel come alive as a nation — after being without a homeland for nearly 2,000 years — then we will know that God’s Kingdom is right at the door.

Has Israel put forth leaves? Yes, most definitely. After the Roman conquest in the First Century B.C., Israelites as a people were dispersed among all nations, often persecuted bitterly, having to live in ghettos, then hunted and exterminated as undesirables. Yet Jewish hopes remained strong in God’s promises of a return to their homeland. “Next year in Jerusalem” was their cry.

This hope was fulfilled in one of the great miracles of our day. The fig tree, Israel, put forth leaves in May 1948 when once again, after thousands of years, it became a nation. God has done no such thing with any other nation.

Luke adds something in his account of this prophecy that makes our faith even stronger: “Behold the fig tree, and all the trees... when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand.” (Luke 21:29-31)

Notice that Luke adds “and all the trees.” If the fig tree pictures Israel, then all the trees would refer to other nations. Luke is telling us that, together with Israel springing to life, many other nations would put forth leaves, sprouting into existence. And what does history tell us? For centuries, up to 1945, the number of independent nations in the world had remained relatively constant at around 70. However, since 1945 the number of independent nations has grown dramatically to 196 nations!

More than 126 new independent nations have sprung into being that were previously held as colonies. This ties in closely with the time that Israel became a nation in 1948. Israel, simultaneously with 126 other nations, has put forth leaves, sprouting into existence. What a thrill to our hearts to realize that we are on the very brink of the greatest event in all human history — the establishment of God’s Kingdom!

Although these many signs indicate great trouble, there is also blessed peace which shall follow, “...when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord... whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:19-26

God’s promises awaiting mankind are beautifully summarized in the closing two chapters of Revelation. They show us that these troubles are not the end. These are only the necessary prelude to the new heavens and earth — the most glorious time, awaiting everyone that has ever lived — God’s Kingdom!

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.” Revelation 21:4, 5