

## INTRODUCTION

When you hear the phrase, "It's a sign of the times" what comes to your mind? If you're into music you might think of the #1 hit song in the 1960s by Petula Clark, "It's a sign of the times, that your love for me is getting so much stronger."

We often use that expression when we see something that has become a part of our lives that is different from the way things used to be. When you see someone texting you think, "It's just a sign of the times that everyone seems to have a smart phone these days." That sign is because of the change in technology. In other words, "the signs of the times" always point to some important changes happening in our world.

It's not a new expression. In His ongoing debate with the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus accused them of being unable to interpret the signs of the times. We can read about this encounter in Matthew 16:1-4:

"The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, 'When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.' Jesus then left them and went away."

Jesus was amazed that these religious do-gooders could look at the sky and read the signs to know what kind of weather was coming, but they couldn't read the sign of His presence among them as the Messiah. He said the only sign they would get would be the sign of Jonah. That's clear prediction of His resurrection. Jesus said in Matthew 12:40, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

It is easier to read weather signs than spiritual signs. Jesus' remark about seeing a red sky was also expressed in an age-old sailors' adage. "Red sky at night, sailors delight. Red sky at morning, sailors take warning."

If you live in East Texas long enough you can start reading the signs of weather changes. In a few weeks, you're going to head out one morning and it will be 80 degrees. But during the day you'll notice a shift in the wind direction from the north. If you can read the signs you know that one of our famous "Blue Northers" is on the way. Cold air is diving down from Canada and though you were wearing short sleeves that morning, you'll be pulling out your coat by that night. One of the most famous blue northers happened on 11/11/11. That's November 11, 1911. Early in the day the temperature in Dallas was a balmy 83 degrees by that evening the temperature had plummeted to 17 degrees. That's a 66 degree change, and that record still stands today. If you don't read the signs of a blue norther coming, you're going to be shivering in your short sleeves!

What Jesus said to the Religious Mafia 2,000 years ago is true for us as well. We can read the signs of the weather, but we are often blind to the spiritual signs all around us. The Pharisees didn't read the clear signs of the first coming of Jesus, and many people are missing the clear signs that point to the second coming of Christ. Let me share with you four spiritual signs that are too bold to miss.

## **SIGN ONE: THE REGATHERING OF ISRAEL**

The nation of Israel was destroyed in 70 A.D. when the Roman General Titus captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Jewish Temple. For the next 2,500 years, the Jews were spread out across the globe. Beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a few Jews started trickling back into Palestine at the risk of their lives. Then in after WWII, the British government was given authority over Palestine and in 1948, Israel became a nation again through the action of the United Nations. This is the clearest sign in our world about the second coming of Christ.

This should not have come as a surprise to any Bible scholar, because this re-gathering of Israel is predicted many times in scripture. The prophet Amos wrote: "I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them...I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the LORD your God. (Amos 9:14-15) And Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this generation [*ethnos*] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." (Luke 21:32)

Some people think the Amos prophecy was referring to the return of Israel after their Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. But the nation was uprooted in 70 A.D. And notice God said they would "NEVER AGAIN TO BE UPROOTED." They are back now and they will be there until the end-time scenario plays out.

When Jesus said, "this generation," some thought He meant a period of time. But the word *ethnos* means He was predicting the Jewish people would survive, they wouldn't pass away.

The Bible is full of prophecies about the end-times involving Israel. Until 1948 these prophecies were meaningless. It's interesting to read some of the messages of Dr. George W. Truett, the great pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas from 1897 until 1944. He died before Israel was refounded, so whenever he came across the word "Israel" he substituted the church. The survival of the Jewish people is a miracle. There were plenty of biblical nations who have been wiped away. Can you find me a Moabite? A Perrizite? An Edomite (not in Edom Texas)? An Ammonite? Nope, but you don't have any trouble finding an Israelite!

Even the preservation of their language is a miracle. For centuries, Hebrew was a dead language spoken nowhere in the world. But within the last century, this dead language has been resurrected and now millions of Israelites speak Hebrew. Their children can easily read the written Hebrew on the Isaiah scroll found in the Dead Sea scrolls.

Have you noticed how often Israel is in the news? They are only a small nation about the size of New Jersey. There are more Jews living in New York City than in Israel! But the world's

attention is directed to this tiny nation for one important reason: It will play a key role in the return of Christ. So this is a sign of the times we cannot ignore.

## **SIGN TWO: THE SPREAD OF MILITANT ISLAM**

Now let me say very clearly that I am not speaking about mainstream Islam. I am referring to that small percentage of Muslims who have embraced the idea of a jihad against the United States, which they call the "Great Satan."

The signs are everywhere. I can remember a time before the 9/11 attacks when Islam wasn't a part of our daily news feed, but since that day until this, there will never be a news day when there is not some article about Islam. Whether it's a nut in Florida who wants to inflame terrorists by burning the Koran or the flak over building a Mosque near Ground Zero, or suicide bombers in the Middle East, Islam is in the news. Words like Al Qaida, the Taliban, and Sharia law are becoming part of our American vocabulary.

There are many Islamic nations, and they have one thing in common: their hatred of Israel. When he first became president of Iran in 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said, "Israel is a disgraceful blot that should be wiped off the face of the earth."

Don't be surprised, because the Bible predicts that in the end times all the nations of the world will attack Israel—and it even gives the size of the attacking army. The Bible says, "You and many nations with you, a great horde, a mighty army. You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land." (Ezekiel 38:15-16) "And the number of the mounted troops was two hundred million." (Revelation 9:16)

It's easy to imagine Islamic nations coming against Israel. And the size army John envisioned is mind-boggling, especially when you realize the entire world population was only 180 million when John wrote that in 90 A.D.

With the expansion of terrorism, an "army" doesn't look like it used to. Don't imagine 200 million soldiers all wearing uniforms holding rifles, standing in formation. The army we've been fighting since 9/11 doesn't wear uniforms. I think this is a reference to an army of militant Muslims. How many militant Muslims are there? We don't know, because that's not something that they openly profess. Nobody at Fort Hood suspected that Major Nadal was a militant Muslim until he started shooting to kill. However, if the militant Muslim nations gathered together against Israel their numbers would easily surpass 200 million.

Now, before you label me a right-wing Christian Islamaphobe, I want to assure you that I love Muslims with the love of Jesus Christ. But I'm not the only one who sees this dangerous sign. I want to read a quote I found online about the spread of militant Islam. As I read it try to guess the source: "The spread of radical Islam can be traced directly to the disastrous coincidence that the more severe forms of Islam, like Wahhabism, dominate the same countries that have some of the world's richest oil reserves. The leaders of these countries, all of which are Islamic theocracies, treated this discovery as proof that God favors their beliefs. And they've used—they're still using—their vast oil wealth to fund an evangelistic movement spreading the poison

of militant Islam throughout the world.” (Source: Daylight Atheists website) Even an openly atheistic organization is alarmed about militant Islam.

Of course, we are all aware of the spread of Islam around the world. In Britain there are more mosques than churches and four times as many Muslims pray on Friday as Christians worship on Sunday. In the U.S., the Muslim population continues to grow. There are now about 3 million Muslims living in America. That’s more than the number of Presbyterians, Episcopalians, or Assemblies of God.

But the danger isn’t just from militant Muslims. We must also be on guard for the attempt on the part of Muslims to quietly institute their culture and sharia laws in America. Shamim Siddiqi is considered a moderate Muslim. He has written a book entitled, “The Need to Convert Americans to Islam.” He doesn’t condone violence, rather he wants to bring about change by creating a Muslim majority. He writes that he sees Islamists in power in Washington by 2020. He writes, “I see Wahaj implementation of the sharia in the United States approaching fast. I have a vision in America, Muslims owning property all over, Muslim businesses, factories, halal meat, supermarkets, all these buildings owned by Muslims. Can you see the vision? Can you see the Newark International Airport and a John Kennedy Airport and LaGuardia having Muslim fleets of planes, Muslim pilots? Can you see our trucks rolling down the highways, Muslim names. Can you imagine walking down the streets of Teaneck, [New Jersey]: three Muslim high schools, five Muslim junior-high schools, fifteen public schools? Can you see the vision, can you see young women walking down the street of Newark, New Jersey, with long flowing hijab and long dresses? Can you see the vision of an area of no crime, controlled by the Muslims?” (quoted in Daniel Pipe’s book *The Danger Within: Militant Islam in America*).

Don’t be afraid. Our God reigns, and He is in control. We just need to be aware of these signs around us. We shouldn’t be burning the Koran, we should be reading it. I think every concerned American should learn as much as possible about Islam. Read Daniel Pipe’s book, *Militant Islam in America*. Don’t keep your head in the sand and don’t get violent. Speak the truth in love. But be watching for this important sign.

Jim Dension wrote: “This is the war of our generation. Radical Muslims want all Western influence out of the Arab world, and then want the entire world to convert to Islam. And so it is absolutely essential that Christians in the West determine to pray every day for Muslims to be reached with the love of Christ, that we give sacrificially for missions to the Muslim world, and that we participate personally as God leads us.”

### **SIGN THREE: THE STRUCTURE FOR A GLOBAL GOVERNMENT**

As I read the Book of Revelation, it becomes clear that the world is moving toward a one-world ruler who will preside over a global government. That has never before happened in history because it was impossible. There were geographical, transportation, and communication barriers. But with the advent of satellites and the world wide web, these barriers no longer exist.

The Bible says this about the Antichrist: “And he [Antichrist] was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation...The ten horns you saw are ten kings who will receive

authority as kings along with the beast [Antichrist] They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. (Revelation 13:7; 17:13)

Now, I don't have time to go into my full beliefs about eschatology. If you want to know more, come to WEBS on Wednesdays, or download my Revelation teaching on iTunes. I firmly believe Christians will be raptured out of this world before this one world government comes into existence. I think the rapture of the church will be the biggest so-called natural disaster in the history of the world. When millions of Christians instantly disappear this will create more global chaos than any earthquake, tsunami, and hurricane combined. Into this global chaos, a single ruler will come on the scene and become a world leader and institute a global government and a global economy.

I have no clue of the identity of this world leader. My only reason for mentioning this is that we now have the advancements in technology to make all this happen. In Revelation 13 we read that this leader will require everyone to have some kind of mark on their hands or head to be able to buy or sell. It's easy to imagine that this could be some kind of invisible bar code that would allow you to conduct all your business without having to bring out a credit card. After all, credit cards can be lost or stolen, but when your unique number is engraved on your hand, you won't ever lose that. If you think I'm saying credit cards or bar codes are of the devil, you've missed my point. I'm just saying the technology is in place to make the predictions in Revelation a possibility.

A global government led by the person the Bible calls the Antichrist is coming. Signs are everywhere. Every time I fly American Airlines, the flight attendant says, "Thank you for flying American Airlines, a member of the one-world alliance." I always smile and think, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

#### **SIGN FOUR: THE GOSPEL IS BEING PREACHED ALL OVER THE WORLD!**

You are probably thinking, "I was feeling pretty good when I came to church, but now I'm afraid from all that I've heard. Thanks a lot for making me feel safe, pastor!" Well, we can't allow ourselves to be blind to what's happening in the world. However, not all the signs are bad. There are plenty of good signs, too! The most exciting sign of the times is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached in every nation on the planet! And the word "gospel" means "good news." There is an explosion of good news around our world.

This global spread of the gospel is a sign that Jesus told us to look for. In Matthew 24 Jesus was talking about the signs of His return. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations [ethnos], and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14) When you read "nations" don't think in terms of countries with clear boundaries. *Ethnos* means every people-group who has a distinctive language and culture. They are called ethno-linguistic groups, or people-groups.

Right now there are more missionaries than anytime in the history of the world. They are actively penetrating every area of the globe to reach every last people group with the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

When my friend Jim Denison spoke here earlier this year, he talked about the world-wide spiritual awakening that is happening. More people are coming to Christ today than at any time in history. 82,000 people are placing their faith in Jesus every day. That's almost like the city of Tyler coming to Christ in one day. In the next 24 hours 32,000 people will accept Christ in Africa; 25,000 will accept Christ in Asia, and 17,000 people in Latin America will trust Christ.

Of course, Dr. Denison also pointed out this spiritual awakening wasn't happening in North America or Europe. Only 6,000 people a day are coming to Christ each day in America and Europe.

The most exciting thing is what is happening in the how Muslims are accepting Christ. Let me quote from Dr. Denison's research: "More Muslims are becoming Christians than at any time in the history of Islam. Thousands of Muslims are seeing visions and dreams of Jesus and coming to faith in him as their Lord. Saudi Arabian Muslim leader Sheikh Ahmad al-Qatanni recently reported on al-Jazeera television that every day, '16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity.' He claimed that Islam was losing six million a year to Christian faith. While he could be inflating his numbers to incite Islamic reaction against Christianity, it is clear that a significant Christian movement is occurring in the Muslim world."

Mission experts tell us there are about 6,000 unique ethno-linguistic groups in our world. Great progress has been made over the past decade in identifying these people groups and taking the gospel to them.

A few years ago, Green Acres adopted a group in Central America called the Miskito Indians. They were an unreached people group. Our members traveled to Central America and paddled in canoes to find these isolated villages. They took a gasoline generator and a projector. They showed the Jesus film projected on the side of a hut. A native translated it into the language the people could understand, and many of them accepted Christ.

Jesus wants every *ethnos*, every people group in the world to hear the good news. In fact He said, "I'm not coming back until every people group has heard the gospel." Could it be that Jesus is waiting for one final people group to hear the gospel? At this very moment there could be some missionaries who have found their village and they are right now in the process of sharing the gospel with this final people group?

These are exciting times to be a part of God's Kingdom. Signs of the times are everywhere! But we must avoid being like the religious leaders in the time of Jesus. God-in-the-flesh stood before them and spoke to them, but they were too blind to see. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "One of our illusions is that the present hour is not the crucial hour." These are exciting times to be a part of God's Kingdom. Signs of the times are everywhere! But we must avoid being like the religious leaders in the time of Jesus. God-in-the-flesh stood before them and spoke to them, but they were too blind to see. I'm afraid many believers today don't have a sense of urgency and fervency when it comes to sharing the gospel with every person that God puts in our path.

## CONCLUSION

There are a lot of things happening in our world, but there is one ongoing story that has captured the world's attention. Outside a small village in the mountains of Chili there are 33 miners who have been trapped there for weeks. We only hear about it occasionally, but in Chili it is the main news story 24 hours a day. The miners are confined to a small, hot area ½ mile below the earth's surface. They are being supplied through several small bore holes. They are totally helpless and have to look up for their every need.

The nation of Chili is sparing no expense to drill a hole large enough to remove the trapped miners. It will take weeks to rescue them. Then each miner will have to sit in a small capsule that will take 3 hours to reach the surface of the earth. I predict in a few weeks, when those miners are finally rescued that the eyes of the entire world will be watching. As those miners blink at the bright sun, there will be cheers heard around the globe. Mining experts say this is the deepest and most complex mining rescue mission in history.

They're wrong of course. The costliest, most complex rescue mission of history took place 2,000 years ago when Jesus came all the way down from the glories of heaven to live among us. Then He went to the cross to rescue us from the destructive consequences of our sin.

And since we have been rescued, He sends us out on a rescue mission every day. This week you are going to encounter people who are still lost in the darkness of sin. Pay attention to the signs; God is putting you in front of those people so you can be a part of His rescue mission.

Can you read the signs of the times? There are forces and ideologies expanding in our world, and all we have to do is to look around us. But as we see these things happening, we should be discouraged, we should be encouraged. We should be challenged to intensify our efforts to share the gospel with everyone we meet.

In 1970 Gordon Jensen wrote a song the Gaithers recorded. It said, "Years of time have come and gone / Since I first heard it told / How Jesus would come again some day / If back then it seemed so real / Then I just can't help but feel / How much closer His coming is today / Signs of the times are everywhere / There's a brand new feeling in the air / Keep your eyes upon the eastern sky / Lift up your head redemption draweth nigh!"

## OUTLINE

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And Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this generation [*ethnos*] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." *Luke 21:32*

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"And the number of the mounted troops was two hundred million." *Revelation 9:16*

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"And he [Antichrist] was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation...The ten horns you saw are ten kings who will receive authority as kings along with the beast [Antichrist] They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. *Revelation 13:7; 17:13*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes