

Bible History and Archeology

10. Signs of Christ's Second Coming

Bible Prophecy

Millions of people around the world are devoted to astrology. Astrology claims you can predict what's going to happen to you by reading the stars, the conjunction of the planets and so forth. Nearly every daily newspaper has a section for horoscopes and your luck in the stars. It includes taking into account where you were born and the date, and they say you can predict what is going to happen in your life on certain days.

It is amazing how uncritically millions of people accept their future in the stars of astrology. Even France's former president, made the statement some years ago, "I would never make an important political decision but I first consult my star chart."

How foolish is it to think that because two people, say Hitler and the Queen of England, had their birthdays on the same day, that they are alike, will do the same things and have the same characters? That's about how foolish some of the beliefs are in this business of astrology. The reason why people are interested in astrology is simply because there has never been a greater desire among human beings to understand the future than there is today. Astrology has been shown to be wrong the majority of times but people just go on believing it!

We do have a book however, that guarantees it can read the future. The God who wrote this Book stakes His whole credibility on the fact that He can read the future. He's actually written it in the Bible so that as we live today we can see statements made two and a half thousand years ago being fulfilled. That's the greatest evidence that this Book is not written by any human being; it's written by God. It claims to be written by God. It gives prophecy or predicting the future as to be the test of whether it is divine or just a human concoction.

Here we will unveil some of the amazing prophecies that this Book deals with in relationship to the last days, our very days.

"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came and tempting desired Him that He would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening ye say it will be fair weather for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky: but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" Matthew 16:1-3.

Jesus calls these men hypocrites, because they should have known the signs of the times but they didn't. How many Christians today would come under that same condemnation because they don't understand the signs of the times that Jesus said we should?

In the days of Jesus, the Jews were very proud of the Temple. Indeed it seemed that they were more upset if someone were to speak against it than even if they insulted God! The disciples also shared in this national pride and Matthew 24 opens up an interesting dialogue between Jesus and His disciples.

“And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Matthew 24:1, 2.

What a shock this was to them, and so later they asked Jesus when it would happen and when the end of the world would be. They thought that such an event as the destruction of that magnificent temple could only occur in connection with the end of all things. Because of this, as Jesus replied, He combined the information about the destruction of Jerusalem with that of His Second Coming.

"And as He sat upon the Mount of Olives the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Matthew 24:3.

Jesus began His discourse in a most significant manner:

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” Matthew 24:4, 5.

Jesus warned that even in their day men would come claiming to be the Messiah and would fool many. This kind of deception would continue on through the ages, even into our days.

In verse 6 He says, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

So it seems that warfare was something that would be fairly continual but did not necessarily point to the end time. The next verse indicates a greater intensity of these things towards the end.

Verse 7. "For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines and pestilence and earthquakes in divers places."

In this our day we hear continually of famines, earthquakes, and pestilences, and they seem to increase as time goes forward. He continues, again combining events of the destruction of the temple, the great tribulation of the middle ages and the last days.

“All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matthew 24:8-14.

Now comes some instruction especially for their day regarding the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out

of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:" Matthew 24:15-20.

Luke 21 is a parallel chapter to Matthew 24; it gives this instruction as:

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter there into. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Luke 21:20-24.

The Christians were given exact instructions so that they could escape the destruction when it came. So how was this fulfilled? What was the 'abomination of desolation' that would stand in a holy place? In AD 66, the Roman armies surrounded the city of Jerusalem. A certain distance around the city was considered to be a holy area, and when the heathen standards of Rome were placed in this area, this was a partial fulfilment of this sign. Clearly it was time for the Christians to make their flight out of the city; but how could they? The Jews were within and the Roman army was without, escape seemed impossible.

Then a most remarkable happening occurred; for no reason at all it seems, the Romans left off the siege and began to march away, the Jews, taking this as a sign that they were about to triumph over the Romans, took off after them in hot pursuit and attacked them from the rear. This gave the Christians the opportunity they needed to make their escape from the doomed city with no interference from either the Romans or the Jews. When the Roman armies returned under Titus in AD 70, there was no reprieve and the city was destroyed with terrible suffering and loss of life.

Now we also see a time period mentioned by Jesus called great tribulation. Just what is this referring to?

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Matthew 24:21, 22.

In Luke it is called the "Times of the Gentiles". Again we see details in each account and as we combine them we get our answer.

"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Luke 21:24.

What were these "Times of the Gentiles"?

"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without

the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months". Revelation 11:1, 2.

Many people teach that this time is in the future, but actually it refers to the 1260 day-year time prophecy of the supremacy of the Roman Papacy, 538 AD to 1798, and it is found in different places in the Bible. Here are some more, each adding its own bit of information to the picture.

"And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time." Daniel 7:25

"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days." Revelation 12:6

"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." Revelation 12:14

This 'woman' is God's true people, and at the time when corruption was coming into the early church and compromises being made with heathenism, many stood for the pure faith, some lost their lives, but others fled, some eastward, and others, into the mountains to the north where they lived in seclusion for many centuries, keeping alive the true faith of the apostles.

"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months." Revelation 13:5.

Each of these time-prophecies refer to the same period and work out to 1260 years; these were the Dark Ages of persecution and truly, as Jesus stated, except they were shortened, no 'flesh' could be saved—that is, all true believers would have been wiped out. They ended in 1798, but before this, help came to God's faithful ones to shorten the time.

What was the help? There are several events that did contribute to helping the faithful believers to survive; one was the protestant reformation that arose in the 1500s. Another was the discovery of the western areas of the Americas which opened up a place to flee away from the papal controlled nations of Europe.

"And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth." Revelation 12:16.

This does refer to the 'New World' as we see the rise of America described as coming up out of the earth. "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon." Revelation 13:11.

Another event which helped to slow and end persecution came about in 1755, when the center of organized persecution and headquarters of the terrible Inquisition at Lisbon was hit by the greatest earthquake in known history, the Lisbon Earthquake. It was followed by a huge tidal wave and then devastating fires raged, destroying the once rich and elegant city which had witnessed the torture and burning to death of thousands of innocent people.

It took place on 'All Saints day', when crowds were gathered in the churches to worship the dead. Here is an account: "The shock of the earthquake "was instantly followed by the fall of every church and convent, almost all the large and public buildings, and one-fourth of the houses. In about two hours afterward, fires broke out in different quarters, and raged with such violence for the space of nearly three days that the city was completely desolated. The earthquake happened on a holy day, when the churches and convents were full of people, very few of whom escaped." "The terror of the people was beyond description. Nobody wept; it was beyond tears. They ran hither and thither, delirious with horror and astonishment, beating their faces and breasts, crying, 'Misericordia! the world's at an end!' Mothers forgot their children, and ran loaded with crucifixes. Unfortunately, many ran to the churches for protection; but in vain was the sacrament exposed; in vain did the poor creatures embrace the altars; images, priests, and people were buried in one common ruin." "Ninety thousand persons are supposed to have been lost on that fatal day." GC88 305.

This prophecy is found in Revelation as well; "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind." Revelation 6:12, 13.

Twenty-five years later appeared the next sign mentioned in the prophecy, the darkening of the sun and moon. What rendered this more striking was the fact that the time of its fulfillment had been definitely pointed out. In the Saviour's conversation with his disciples upon Olivet, after describing the long period of trial for the church—the 1260 years of papal persecution, concerning which he had promised that the tribulation should be shortened—he thus mentioned certain events to precede his coming, and fixed the time when the first of these should be witnessed: "In those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light." [Mark 13:24.] The 1260 days, or years, terminated in 1798. A quarter of a century earlier, persecution had almost wholly ceased. Between these two dates, according to the words of Christ, the sun was to be darkened. On the 19th of May, 1780, this prophecy was fulfilled. {GC88 305.3}

Said Jesus: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars." [Luke 21:25.] "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." [Mark 13:24-26.] The Revelator thus describes the first of the signs to precede the second advent: "There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon become as blood." [Revelation 6:12.] {GC88 304.1}

Then in November 13, 1833, came the next heavenly sign, the falling of the stars.

"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Daniel 12:4

Wherever our world is going today, it's going there fast. And remember the Bible says through the prophet Daniel, one of the great characteristics of the end of time will be that knowledge will be increased and you don't have to be a believer to accept what we are saying. We see it with our own two eyes. And that's what I like about the Bible.

People say, "You've got to accept the Bible on blind faith and just hope it is so." That is not true. The Bible gives evidence after evidence that God knows the future and He's written it all down. Some think that the prophets must have been pretty smart men to be able to write all those things down. Actually they weren't a bit smarter than you and I. Notice the words of Daniel; Daniel 12:8. "And I heard but I understood not."

Daniel or John did not figure out these things themselves, they simply wrote what God told them and this is what makes the Bible unique, different than any other book. This is what makes it God's Book. God told Daniel what to write and Daniel wrote it down. That's why it is as up to date as your morning newspaper because it deals with things that are taking place in the world right before our eyes and it is a Living Book.

The Bible lists many conditions that will exist in the last days in society. It speaks of the rich crying out because things occur that cause them to lose their hoarded wealth.

"Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered and the rust of them shall be a witness against you and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days." James 5:1-3.

Now that's strange language. We usually don't think of rich men weeping and howling do we because we have favorites of fortunes and so forth to describe the rich don't we? Let's now notice why the rich are going to weep.

The Bible does not condemn one for being rich, but what does matter is how they got that way!

Verse 4. "Behold the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cries: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

In our day there are more millionaires and billionaires than ever before, but the gap between the rich and the poor is greater than ever. Many of the great fortunes of our time have been amassed by taking advantage of the very poor by systems that entrap them into having to labor in slavery-type conditions for ridiculously low wages. Sometimes they are cheated even out of that pittance. They have done the back-breaking labor that has allowed the rich to make their high profits; they have reaped down their fields, but have been cheated of reasonable working conditions and wages. What else does it say about the rich?

"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you." James 5:5, 6.

Never before has society been so geared to entertainment and indulgence. The power that the wealth of many of these huge corporations allows them to wield, also puts them beyond

justice. The legal system turns a deaf ear to the pleas of the poor. He doth not resist, because he has no way to do it.

Here is another reference to these conditions:

"The LORD standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the people. The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: [Leaders, CEOs, and rulers] for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts." Isaiah 3:13-15.

And another from Isaiah that refers to corruption.

"And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment." Isaiah 59:14, 15.

What advice are we given? Be patient recognizing that these things are going to take place and are a sign of Jesus' coming.

"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." James 5:7, 8.

No one in the world today, knows exactly the date when Jesus is going to return; but Jesus said that you can know something.

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh. So likewise you when ye shall see all these things know that it is near, even at the doors." Matthew 24:32, 33.

Jesus says "When ye shall see all these things taking place you know that My coming is even at the door, you'll know it is very close."

"But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only," Matthew 24:36.

"But as the days of Noah were so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark. And knew not until the flood came end took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:37-39.

Jesus said. "It you want to know what conditions are going to be like just before I return you have a look at what they were just before the flood." conditions are going to be parallel to those before the flood. What were they just before the flood?

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5.

Considering imaginations, certainly the stuff people read, watch and admire today mostly revolves around some form of sin and often violence. It is inevitable that people will act wrong, when they think wrong. The fiction, novels, movies and computer games depict violence and crime of every type. The result is to be expected.

"The earth also was corrupt before God and the earth was filled with violence." Genesis 6:11.

Do you think that word "corrupt" is overstating our world today? You know we even have it in our politicians unfortunately? Even our leaders who we think ought to be above that, but we find corruption. Someone in a responsible position is being paid to turn a blind eye to things that he should deal with.

"The earth was filled with violence." Is that a parallel? Sure it is. We can hear it and read about it in the news every day.

What are we to do? Are we to be discouraged and to be downhearted and to get all fearful? No! What does it say?

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Luke 21:27, 28.

When Jesus comes, is it going to be my redemption. Is it going to be yours? What a tragedy to know all these things and still not be ready for the coming of Jesus. And that's why the first business of every person is to make sure we are ready. It maybe coming sooner than we care to think but it is coming and God wants us to be ready. That's why He's sending a special message in these last days to get people ready for that wonderful day.

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Matthew 24:44.