



REVELATION speaks peace

A Planet In Upheaval

One day the disciples came to Jesus with a burning question: they asked Him, “what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3) Though they asked for one sign, Jesus gave them a list of things to watch for that would reveal the nearness of His coming. He then made a statement that is a major key to understanding of the prophecy of Matthew 24. He said, “All of these are the beginning of sorrows.” (Matthew 24:8)

Skeptics sometimes say that the list of events given in Matthew 24 are not signs of any significance, because the majority of the events described are nothing new. We have always had wars, pestilences, famines, etc. Those who take this position, however, appear to be missing the point Christ makes in the eighth verse. The word sorrows is translated from the Greek *odin*, which has a significant meaning: birth pains. In other words, *contractions*.

The pain itself is not the signal; the frequency and intensity of the contractions are. Over the last few years, the signs Jesus spoke of have accelerated and intensified at an astonishing rate. Jesus’ signs can be roughly categorized into three general groups: signs in the religious world, signs in the political world and signs in the natural world.

THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

Jesus said that when “many” come and claim to be Christ, it is an indication that we are living in the last moments before His appearing (Matthew 24:5, 11). In recent years, the number of people who claim to be the Messiah has escalated to the point where roughly 1,200 people (with followings!) make that claim in North America alone. Consider such notorious recent examples as Charles Manson, David Koresh, Jim Jones and Marshall Applewhite—the list seems to be getting longer by the day.

Additionally, much of the Christian world has tragically begun to slip into a “form of godliness” while “denying its power.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Christian beliefs— like the authority of God’s Word, or the deity of Christ—are being changed or ignored at an alarming rate. While millions still hold to the scriptures, there is a concerning trend towards unbelief.

THE POLITICAL WORLD

Jesus said, “Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matthew 24:6, 7). Our generation has witnessed more deaths caused by war than any generation in history. Even though optimistic leaders declared that the 20th century would be an era of peace, it proved to be the bloodiest century in history.

Our Lord pointed to our day and age when He spoke of “men’s hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth...” (**Luke 21:26**) Today, our fears have been compounded by biological weaponry that can be manufactured inexpensively by terrorists.

THE NATURAL WORLD

Among the signs Jesus lists are famine, pestilence and earthquake (**Matthew 24:7**). Famine is at an all-time high—with four out of five children born each day into families that cannot afford to feed them. Millions die of starvation each year in spite of the fact that the world has enough food to prevent it. More than 800 million people are malnourished on a planet that easily has enough for all.

Pestilence is also on the increase—with frightening new diseases like Avian Bird Flu, Ebola, SARS, MERS, West Nile Virus and treatment-resistant strains of tuberculosis. Not only are diseases a problem, but natural disasters are also becoming commonplace. “Once-in-a-lifetime” catastrophes have become regular occurrences, to the point where we scarcely raise an eyebrow when we see them on the news.

Jesus also mentioned a rise in earthquakes. (**Matthew 24:7**) You don’t have to be a statistician or a seismologist to recognize the astounding increase in earthquakes in our time. Significant quakes in the last century total more than the previous 19 centuries combined. The quake that caused the Asian tsunami was the first one to be felt by every instrument on earth—its magnitude was 9.3, and it left an 800-mile gash in the ocean floor.

None of these signs were meant to scare us—they were meant to keep us watching! Jesus said in **John 16:21, 22** that the moment will come when the birth pains (the “sorrows”) will have past, and we will be with Him. When that happens, our joy will so far overshadow our sorrow that we will have trouble remembering what this world was like.

In the meantime, as we wait, the gospel message continues to spread at an astounding rate. One of the greatest signs given by Jesus is found in **Matthew 24:14**: the gospel will be preached to all the world. This seemed like an impossible task not many years ago, but with modern technology the gospel message is reaching the masses at an astonishing rate. Spiritual revivals are breaking out in Africa, South and Central America. Millions of former Hindus are turning to God’s Word. In spite of fierce persecution, the church continues to grow in China. From the islands of the sea to the massive metropolitan cities, God is on the move. Prophecy is being fulfilled.

We live in an unusual time. God’s final call is going out to a planet in upheaval. Millions around the world are responding. As you see the signs unfolding, what is your response to Him?