

Title: The Sign  
Text: Matthew 24

*Prayer 1*

A few years ago a national science magazine carried on its cover a picture of a clock set at three minutes to twelve. It represented the concept of how close we are to the end of history. The Bible seems to indicate that our time on this earth is limited. And the reasons for this conclusion are a number of prophecies throughout the Bible that are being fulfilled, now, or, will be in the very near future. Now, we are going to look at some of these ~~signs~~ <sup>prophecies</sup>. Tonight, I want to look at the first sign as described in Matthew chapter 24. Would you please take your Bibles and turn to Matthew chapter 24. Matthew 24.....

Matthew 24 is probably the most important single prophecy concerning the coming of Jesus in the entire Bible. This chapter is not only the most complete coverage of the second coming, but it provides a framework into which all other prophecies must fit to be understood. In fact, this prophecy was so important that it was included in three of the four Gospels.

Now, to properly understand this prophecy keep in mind the setting in which it was given. Jesus had already predicted his death. Now, as was his custom when in Jerusalem, He went into the temple to pray.

Now, let's pick up the reading of the text...Chapter 24 verse 1....  
"And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him."

Apparently, the disciples were trying to impress Jesus with the beauty of Herod's Temple. But Jesus used the opportunity to convey a prediction about the temple itself, for he said in Vs 2...~~"And He answered and said to them,~~ 'Do you not see all these things?(meaning the Temple buildings) Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

Now, please note the specific content of this prophecy. Jesus did not say that the temple was just to be destroyed. But, that "there shall not be left here one ~~stone~~ <sup>stone</sup> upon another, which will not be torn down."

And dear friends, that prophecy was literally fulfilled.

History records that this prophecy was fulfilled forty years later. In A.D. 70, armies of Titus surrounded Jerusalem, and after a 143-day siege they destroyed the city, including the temple.

One story has it that Titus gave the order to preserve all religious buildings in the city, but this order was disobeyed. The story has it that the heat from the burning city melted the gold overlay of the temple. This melted gold seeped into the joints of the building's massive stones. Since Roman soldiers were paid primarily by what they could plunder, they wanted that gold. To get it, they had to take the temple apart stone by stone.

Of course the fulfillment of the prophecy does not depend on this interesting story. Historical fact reveals that the temple was destroyed until there was "not one stone upon another." {Also, the Dome of the Rock, the second most holy edifice of the Muslim world, is located on the exact spot of the old temple. You can be sure that the Arabs would not allow a trace of the Jewish temple to remain there. HOWEVER, we should all be familiar with this fulfillment, because the conclusion of the six-day Israel-Arab war<sup>'67</sup> produced pictures of Jews rejoicing and weeping at the "wailing wall". The "wailing wall" is a reminder of the once glorious temple of Herod. The "wall" is made up of stones from the temple of Jesus' day, but not one square inch of the wall rests on the site of the old temple.

Now, let's come to the disciples questions. After predicting the destruction of the Temple, the Lord led his disciples across the valley to one of his favorite places, THE MOUNT OF OLIVES. And there, the disciples ask Him three questions. Matthew chapter 24, Verse 3.....

1. Tell us, when will these things be.....
2. Secondly, what will be the sign of Your coming,
3. And third, what will be the sign of the end of the age?

THREE QUESTIONS.....(Repeat questions).....

Now, Jesus answers two of these three questions here in Matthew 24. He answers questions two and three. The answer to the first question.. "when will these things be"...that is, "when will the temple be destroyed"...is record in Luke chapter 19. But, in Matthew 24 Jesus gives to us the answer to question two and three..

WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN OF YOUR COMING; AND WHAT WILL BE THE SIGN OF THE END OF THE AGE.

Before we go on, you must understand what is meant by the phrase "end of the age"....This is not referring to the end of the church age. The church age ends with the rapture of the church. The rapture of the church takes place 7 years prior to the end of the age. So, we are not talking here about the end of a church age. But we are talking about the end of the age when Jesus will come in great power and glory. And every eye will behold his coming. And I hope that is very clear in your minds.

\* Now, before giving the sign, Jesus warned his disciples, in Vs 4, to "See to it that no one misleads you."

Then in verses 5 and 6 Jesus predicted two false signs....

Vs 5.."For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will mislead many." How true that is.....History has revealed hundreds of false Messiahs, who, I must confess, have never lacked a following. Some have appeared and used the name of Jesus in vain. Others have established cults or religious sects which have and are leading many astray. The Occult is a good example.

Now, the Christian who knows anything about the Bible should never be deceived by false witnesses. For when Christ comes we will need no introduction, for we will "be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Vs 6..."And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end."

That is the second false sign. My major in college was history. And it didn't take me long to realize that a study of history is basically a study of war. Ever since man rejected Jesus by saying, "We will not have this man reign over us; we have no king but Caesar," they have had Caesars who led them into war after war.

The story is told of a newspaper boy who went to collect from an elderly customer. When he got there to collect the woman lashed out at him, "If all you can bring me is news about war, war, war, you can stop delivering this paper."

And I have thought about that as I review history. History is certainly a study of wars. But, if you find yourself in the same desperation that this woman was in, then please remember the words of Jesus in Vs 6 and take comfort in them: "When you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, see that you are not frightened." *No need for a Christian to be frightened*

A few years ago I saw a sermon title on an outside church bulletin board entitled: "WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS - A SIGN OF THE LORD'S RETURN."

Now, I do not know what this minister said in his sermon. But I do know that his title was wrong. Jesus said, "All this must take place, but the end is not yet."

Wars and rumors of wars indicate that we have NOT reached the end of the age.

Now, it should be kept in mind that Jesus did include the subject of war while talking about <sup>the</sup> signs. The reason will be seen in Vs 7 as He singles out of history a very special war which I believe is THE SIGN *and the answer to Question Three*

Now, please notice Vs 7..."For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes." Other translations also include the word "Pestilence"... There will be famines....pestilence...and earthquakes in various places.

So, after noting that the ordinary wars of history were not "the sign," Jesus uses a phrases to indicate a special war. This special war was to be started by two nations getting into a conflict with each other and then joined by the kingdoms of the world.

So, Vs 7 teaches a four-fold sign:

1. A world war started by two nations.
2. Famines
3. Pestilence
4. Earthquakes in various places.

Now, we are ready to ask:...HAS THERE EVER BEEN A WAR, STARTED BY TWO NATIONS, WHICH GREW INTO A WORLD WIDE WAR BY THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD, FOLLOWED BY UNPRECEDENTED FAMINES, PESTILENCE, AND EARTHQUAKES IN VARIOUS PLACES?

YES!!! I believe there has been such a war. A war which fulfills all four parts of this prophecy. AND THE WAR THAT I AM REFERRING TO IS WW1

Consider the facts: The spark that started WW1, flared on June 28, 1914, during a state visit to Serbia by the heir to the Austrian throne, Francis Ferdinand. A Serbia zealot assassinated the Austrian prince. This resulted in <sup>✓</sup>month of hostilitis between the two countries. Finally, Austria declared war on Serbia on July 28. <sup>1914</sup> And in the next few months the kingdoms of the world chose sides and entered the conflict until 27 nations officially declared war.

And before it was over, 43 of the major nations of the world were involved. In fact, every major power and a majority of the smaller nations joined one side or the other.

Let me share with you some statistics to illustrate the immense proportions of WW 1.

Julius Caesar extended the Roman Empire from the Euphrates River in Persia to England's ~~Thames River~~ with an army of 400,000.

The Napoleonic wars covered all Europe except England, Western Asia, and North Africa, yet he had only 750,000 troops.

It is recorded that one out of every seven men on the earth during 1914-1918 were in uniform, totaling 53 million.

Now, it is impossible to be certain how many soldiers died in battle during WW 1, but many historians put the figure at 37 million.

The financial cost of this conflict has been placed in excess of \$337 billion dollars, which in that day exceeded by one-third the estimated wealth of the U.S.

Historians agree that WW 1 was unique in the annals of warfare. In other great wars one nation was usually the principal aggressor against smaller nations. For example, Alexander the Great led the Greeks, and Julius Caeasar the Romans to widespread empires. Many other leaders have tried: Attilia the Hun, Ghengis Khan, Napoleon Bonaparte, Adof Hitler.

But, friends, WW 1 was different. The powers of the World were divided along nationalistic lines with no great prize at stake. What started as a conflict between two little countries turned into a world war as the kingdoms of the world joined one side or other.

Thus, I believe, WW 1 fulfilled the prophetic statement of a worldwide conflict started by two nations.

But, that is only the first part of the four-fold prophecy. To qualify as THE SIGN of the end of the age, it must also be followed by famines, pestilence, and earthquakes. Again, history reveals that the aftermath of WW 1 did indeed produce these things.

Famine always follows war...the greater the war, the greater the famine. History tells us that following WW 1 and the revolutions which followed, more than 27 million people starved to death. This figure exceed any in world history, including the famines following WW 2 and the recent famines in Africa.

Pestilence or disease and plagues usually follow famines. If our diet is inadequate, we become susceptible to many diseases. Statistics show a tremendous number of deaths afer WW 1 due to tuberculosis, plagues, cholera, typhus, and cancer...just to name a few.

History tells us that the influenz epidemis which swept through Europe and jumped the Atlantic, killed more American civilians than died on the battlefields. <sup>~</sup>Some estimates go as high as 28 million deaths due to influenza.

The fourth part of the sign relates to "earthquakes in various places." Or, as some suggest, multiple earthquakes. And I don't believe I need to illustrate this truth. Since 1950 the number of recorded earthquakes throughout the world have doubled the number recorded in all of previous history...

So, when you add all these facts together, they give us good reason to conclude that the Austrian declaration of war on July 28, 1914 began to fulfill THE SIGN of the end of the age as given by our Lord in Matthew 24.

Now, please remember, the sign was not intended to usher in the end. It was merely the beginning of the end, as Vs 8 tells us. "These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."

*pangs*

*Rose built ~~from first~~*

"~~The beginning of suffering or travail~~" is easily understood when we consider natural childbirth. My wife has given birth to four children. Since we have lived in different parts of the country, only two were delivered by the same doctor, but all three doctors gave us the same medical advice. "When your birth pains start coming at regular intervals ~~time them~~. When they are three-minutes apart - head for the hospital." The same things hold true about the signs of the end. [Not one of my doctors advised us that after the first birth pain, we were to look for the birth of the baby. <sup>Oh!</sup> No, the first birth pain was the signal that we were to look for the second. Only after they came at regular intervals were we to look for the baby.

So Jesus would have us know that after the first sign or birth pain we should look for other birth pains. Like a woman in <sup>labor</sup> ~~suffering~~, we would experience several other signs or birth pains which would increase as history brings us closer to the time of Christ coming. <sup>and</sup> I believe ~~that~~ that is what has happened since 1914.

In the weeks to come we will consider other signs or birth pains of the last days.

PREPARATION

But today is today and now is now. It is important that we live for Christ today and that we are ready when Christ comes. Part of the reason Christ gave to us his prophecy is that we might "watch and be ready." We cannot know the day or the hour of his coming, just as a woman cannot tell exactly when her child will be born. She can judge by the increasing birth pains that it is near, but the exact moment of birth comes suddenly. So it will be with our Lord's coming.

If you have any doubt that you have invited Jesus Christ into your life, let me urge you to do ~~do~~ right now. God knows your heart and will respond if in simple faith you ask him into your life. The Bible assures us: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of Jeus shall be saved."