The Signs of the Times

What are the indicators?

In Hebrews 10:25 we are told that we are "to encourage one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." The context is the Second Coming of Jesus.

This passage makes it clear that we can know the season of the Lord's return — the season, not the date. Tangible things will be visible to alert us to the Lords soon return. What are those things? What are the signs the Bible tells us to watch for?

There are a great number and variety of these signs. In fact, there are so many that it is difficult to get a handle on them. They tend to overwhelm you.

The best way I have found to get a grasp on them is to group them into several broad categories. Lets take a look at them in that manner.

1 The Signs of Nature

The signs pertaining to nature have gained the least respect. Often when I point to these signs, people react by saying, "You've got to be kidding!"



The problem is twofold. First, people are prone to think, "There have always been earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes and famine. So, what else is new?" Such people are either ignorant of, or have ignored, the fact that Jesus said these natural signs would be like birth pangs and would thus increase in frequency and intensity as the time draws near for His return.

The second problem is more philosophical. We are a very rationalistic people and, as such, we tend to be skeptical of the supernatural. If we can't see it, weigh it and measure it, we can't accept its existence. Yet, the Bible teaches there is a whole realm of reality that is not normally perceptible to the senses — the realm of the supernatural that includes angels and demons (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Because we are so rationalistic, we tend to scoff at the idea that God would speak to us through signs of nature. But the Bible affirms this over and over. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly pointed to signs of nature and claimed that they indicated the judgment of God or His impending wrath.

The book of Joel is a classic example of this point. The book begins with the prophet pointing to a locust invasion that has stripped the land barren. He declares that this is no accident of nature or just bad luck. Rather, the locusts were sent by the Lord as a warning, calling the nation to repentance. And the prophet makes it clear that if they do not heed the warning, God will send something worse than the locusts — namely, a foreign army.

A Biblical Tradition

God has always spoken through signs of nature, just as He did when He put a special light in the heavens to mark the birth of Jesus. Likewise, on the day Jesus was crucified, Jerusalem experienced a great earthquake and three hours of unusual darkness. On the day Jesus returns, we are told that the greatest earthquake in history will shake the world. Every mountain will be lowered, every valley will be lifted and every island will be moved (Revelation 16:17-21).

It is no wonder that Jesus told us to watch for "famines and earthquakes" (Matthew 24:7) and for "plagues and signs from heaven" (Luke 21:11).

Nor is it any wonder that a glance at the statistics in a world almanac will confirm that all of these natural calamities have been increasing in frequency and intensity since the start of the 20th Century. As earthquakes continue to shake our west coast, as scientists proceed to make startling new discoveries in the heavens, as famine sweeps Africa and as pestilence stalks the world, we need to get serious about the signs of nature.

Keep in mind, too, that God often uses natural calamities as remedial judgments — remedial in the sense that He works through them to call people to repentance. Examples in our nation's recent history would include the Vietnam War, the 9/11 attacks and Hurricane Katrina. The coronavirus pandemic should be viewed as a planetary remedial judgment, calling the whole world to repentance.

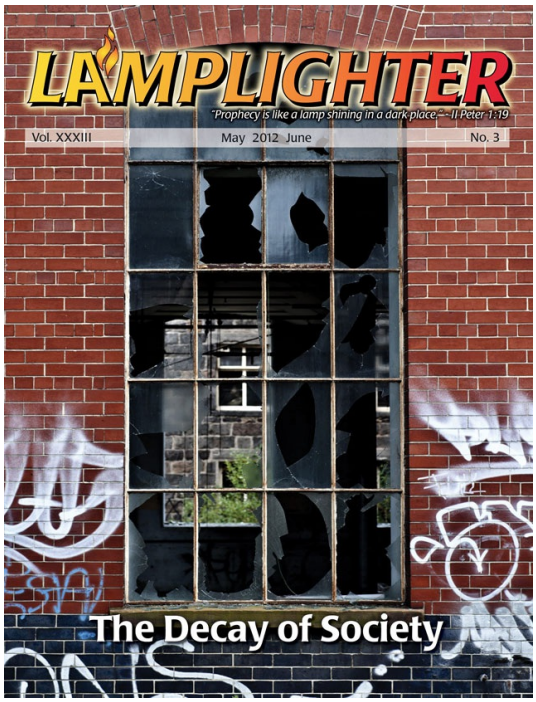
Just as He has always done, God is speaking today through signs of nature. Are you listening?

2 The Signs of Society

Jesus said He would return at a time when society would resemble "the days of Noah" (Matthew 24:37).

The Old Testament tells us that Noah's age was one of immorality and violence because the thoughts of men's hearts were continually focused on evil (Genesis 6:5-13). The New Testament reveals even more about the degraded nature of Noah's society. Romans 1:18-32 gives a chilling description of a society wallowing in immorality.

In this passage Paul says the root cause of all the problems was man's rejection of God: "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). In other words, they put their faith



in Man, giving their allegiance to Humanism, the religion of Satan.

Paul says that because they turned their backs on God, He removed some of His restraints on evil and "gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity" (Romans 1:24). The result was an outbreak of sexual sin in the form of fornication and adultery.

When they continued in their idolatry and immorality, God further removed His restraints on evil and "gave them over to degrading passions" (Romans 1:26). The result was an epidemic of homosexuality which produced woeful diseases, for "men received in their own persons the due penalty of their error" (Romans 1:27).

As the homosexual plague gained momentum, and there was no repentance, God turned the society over to "a depraved mind" (Romans 1:28). The result was a cesspool of wickedness as people were filled with greed, envy, deceit, hatred, arrogance and malice. These attitudes were reflected in a growing tide of unrighteous acts. Slander, rebellion and violence increased (Romans 1:28-31).

Paul speaks in the first chapter of Romans as an historian, telling us what the days of Noah were like. In 2 Timothy 3:1-5 he speaks as a prophet, using almost the identical language of Romans to tell us what the society of the end-times will be like. In doing so, he confirms the statement of Jesus that He will return at a time when society has gone full circle, returning to the depravity of Noah's day.

Characteristics of a Collapsing Society

Paul says that the society of the end-times will be characterized by great stress (2 Timothy 3:1). It will be a society in which people will love three things: self, money and pleasure (2 Timothy 3:2-4). What Paul identifies here is the religion, the god and the lifestyle of the end-time society.

The religion will be the same as in the times of Noah. It will be Humanism, the love of self. Whenever Humanism is the religion, the god is always Materialism — the love of money. And when Materialism is the god, the lifestyle is always Hedonism, the love of pleasure.

These three Satanic loves — self, money, and pleasure — combine to produce a fourth characteristic called Nihilism. It is the payoff. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7), and the harvest of Humanism, Materialism and Hedonism is Nihilism — or despair.

Paul describes the resulting despair in graphic terms: "men will be . . . boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited . . ." (2 Timothy 3:2-4).

Application to America

Does this sound familiar? It sounds like the evening news to me. We call ourselves a Christian nation, but our predominant religion is really Humanism. Humanists control nearly all aspects of our government as well as our schools.

We are a nation of materialists who worship the dollar. Greed is the motivating force of big labor, big business, big government, big religion and big sports.

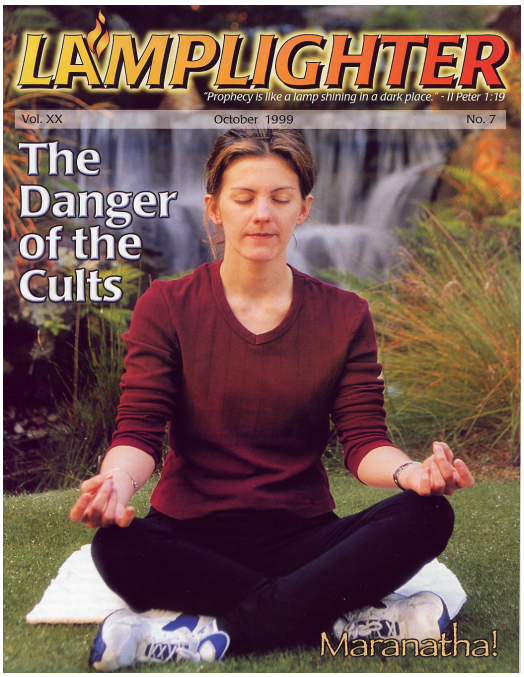
And do I really need to say anything about our hedonistic lifestyle? "If it feels good, do it!" is the philosophy of our age.

What's worse is that we are exporting our pagan values and lifestyle to the rest of the world through our degrading television programs and movies. The American dream of money, sex and power has become the world's dream.

And we are reaping what we have sown. Our society wallows in despair as people seek to fill the vacuum in their lives with drugs, alcohol, sex and violence. Prophecy is being fulfilled before our very eyes — indicating that Jesus is coming soon.

3 The Spiritual Signs

There are numerous spiritual signs that we are to watch for, both negative and positive ones.



The negative ones are very negative indeed. They include such things as the appearance of false Christs and their cultic groups (Matthew 24:5,11,24), the apostasy of the professing church (2 Timothy 3:5), the persecution of faithful Christians (Luke 21:12-19) and an outbreak of Satanism (1 Timothy 4:1).

We are in the midst of the fulfillment of all these prophecies. The cults began their major assault on the Church with the founding of the Mormon Church in the 19th Century. Since that time, the cults have multiplied profusely to the point that today they are operating all over the world, deceiving millions with their preaching of a false Jesus and salvation by good works.

Meanwhile, much of mainline Christianity wallows in apostasy. Many of the old-line denominations have rejected the authority of the Scriptures and are now ordaining homosexuals and preaching New Age philosophy. Some Charismatic groups have rejected the true Gospel for a pollyanna gospel that promises health, wealth and power. Others have decided that preaching the Word is too offensive to the world, and so they are spooning out a positive-thinking pablum that is designed to make people comfortable with their sins.

The apostasy has become so widespread that even some of those calling themselves "Evangelicals" are approving of abortion and same-sex marriage. And some are teaching the heresy of "many roads to God."

True Christians — those who live their faith, speak out against ungodliness and stand for righteousness — are being submitted to increasing persecution. Their rights are being denied in schools. They are discriminated against in the workplace in both hiring and promotion. They are mocked by the entertainment media. Their churches are increasingly harassed by zoning codes and vandals.

Satan is on the prowl. He knows Bible prophecy, and He knows his time is short. He is attacking the Church with a vengeance.

He has also gone public, and the consequent outbreak of Satanism is something to behold. It is pervasive. Satanic themes dominate books, movies, television programs and music. People are enthralled with astrology, numerology, transcendental meditation, channeling, crystal-gazing and many other such manifestations of occultic entrapment.

Positive Spiritual Signs

I warned you that the negative signs are very negative, pointing to a society that is spiritually sick to its core. Lets move on to the positive spiritual signs and do some rejoicing!

One is the proclamation of the Gospel to all the world (Matthew 24:14). This prophecy began to be fulfilled in the 20th Century as a result of modern technology such as shortwave radio, satellite television and the Internet. With the advent of computer technology, the Bible has been rapidly translated into hundreds, even thousands, of languages and dialects.

Another positive sign is the increasing understanding of Bible prophecy. Many of the prophecies concerning the end-times were not even understood by the prophet who received them from God. A good example is Daniel. He was mystified by many of the end-time prophecies which the Lord gave him. When he complained about this, the Lord told him to stop worrying about it because "the words are concealed and sealed up until the end-time" (Daniel 12:4,9).

As we get nearer to the day the Lord will return, we understand more and more of Bible prophecy. Some of the new understanding is due to the development of world events, such as the re-establishment of the nation of Israel. Other mysterious prophecies can now be understood due to modern technological developments.

But some of our greater understanding is due to the illumination of the Holy Spirit — not the giving of new revelation, but the provision of enlightenment concerning the revelation that has already been given in God's Word.

One of the most glorious spiritual signs is the rich outpouring of Gods Spirit that the Church is receiving in these end-times. The Bible prophesies that a great Holy Spirit empowerment will come in the latter days to enable Christians who are open to the Spirit's power to stand against the assaults of Satan.

In Joel 2:23 this is put in the imagery of an "early rain and a latter rain." The early rain was at Pentecost and continued through the early history of the Church when it was young and struggling to get established. The latter rain is occurring today to enable the true Church to stand firm against the final assaults of Satan.

4 The Signs of Technology

The explosion of scientific knowledge and its technical application to communications, transportation, data processing and weapons of war is definitely a sign of the soon return of the Lord (Daniel 12:4).



Consider, for example, how many prophecies we can now understand for the first time due to technological developments. Revelation 11 says that two great prophets of God will preach for 3½ years during the first half of the Tribulation and then be killed by the Antichrist. Their bodies will lie in the streets of

Jerusalem for 3½ days and all the people in the world will look upon them (Revelation 11:3-13).

Prior to 1957, when the first satellite was put into orbit, it was very difficult to understand how all the people of the world could look upon two bodies lying in the streets of Jerusalem. Today we don't even stop to think about it because we know the capability of satellite television.

How could all the people of the world be given the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16-18) before the invention of lasers and computers? How could the False Prophet make an image of the Antichrist that would appear to be alive (Revelation 13:14-15) before the development of robotics and holograms?

Jesus said that in the end-times one of the signs will be men "fainting from fear over the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Luke 21:26). It sounds like the splitting of the atom to me — and the subsequent development of nuclear weapons.

5 The Signs of World Politics

Bible prophecy forecasts the coming together of a certain international pattern of nations in the end-times.



WORLD POLITICS IN THE END TIMES

The nation of Israel will once again exist, and all the nations of the world will seek to destroy the Jewish state (Zechariah 12:1-3). Particularly menacing to Israel will be a superpower located in "the remote parts of the north" (Ezekiel 38:6). This nation is identified in Ezekiel 38 in terms that can only be interpreted to mean modern day Russia. The existence of the Jewish state will also be threatened by its Arab neighbors (Ezekiel 35).

The resurgence of China as a superpower is also prophesied (Revelation 9:12-16 and 16:12), as is the reunification of Europe (Daniel 7:7-8, 24).

The world will be characterized by wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6). The nations will also be afflicted with internal political strife that will often lead to "kingdom against kingdom," or civil war (Matthew 24:7). Lawlessness will increase everywhere (Matthew 24:12) — a prophecy that has been fulfilled on the international scene with the advent of modern terrorism.

It is particularly interesting that the word translated "nation" in Matthew 24:7 ("nation will rise against nation"), is the Greek word ethnos which refers to "an ethnic people group" rather than a political nation-state.

Since the break up of the Soviet Union, we have seen great outbreaks of ethnic violence — not only in the former Soviet republics, but also in areas like Yugoslavia, the Middle East and even here in the United States, as manifested in riots in some of our largest cities.

There is no doubt about the fact that we are living in a world where the end-time political pattern has come together.

6 The Signs of Israel

The most important group of signs, more important than all the rest put together, is the group that pertains to the nation of Israel.



The reason they are so important is because the Jewish people are Gods prophetic time clock. By this I mean that very often when the Lord is revealing that an important event will take place in the future, He will point to the Jewish people and assert that when a certain thing happens to them, the important event will also occur.

An example of this principle is found in Luke 21:24, where Jesus told His disciples to watch Jerusalem. His point was that Jerusalem would be conquered and then "trampled under foot by the Gentiles" until it was time for Him to return. In other words, He was saying that whenever the Jews win back the city of Jerusalem from the Gentiles, it will be a sure sign that His return is near.

The Romans conquered Jerusalem about 40 years after Jesus spoke these words. They were succeeded by the Byzantines who were, in turn, succeeded by a host of Gentile nations until June

7, 1967 when the Jews finally re-occupied the city of Jerusalem for the first time in 1,897 years.

The Gentile world may not recognize the importance of this event, but the Orthodox Jews certainly do. They know the Old Testament prophecies and they therefore know that the Messiah is coming when they are back in their land and their city. That's why you can see banners all over Israel today that read: "Prepare for the Coming of the Messiah!"

The Most Important Sign

The signs pertaining to the Jewish people and the nation of Israel may very well be the most important group of signs, but the single most important sign is one that I have not yet identified.

What I have in mind is a sign that can be summed up in one word: **CONVERGENCE**. What I mean by this is that for the first time in history, *all* the signs have converged. None are missing.

Are You Ready?

God in His grace and mercy has provided us with a host of signs to prepare us for the soon return of His Son. Prophecy is being fulfilled daily before our eyes. Jesus said in Luke 21:28 that when these signs begin to appear, "straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

We are living on borrowed time. Are you ready? Are you yearning? Can you say with Paul in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 that you are a candidate for a "crown of righteousness" because you are living your life in the love of His appearing? ✣