

**THE TWELVE SIGNS
OF THE END TIMES
IN THE
TEACHING OF JESUS**

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Adapted from his bi-monthly audio Update Messages in 2013

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The Twelve Signs of the End Times in the Teaching of Jesus

These are all events which Jesus said will happen before the Parousia (the common Greek word for the 'Second Coming of Jesus').

There are three main sources for this teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. They are in **Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21** and there are 12 such signs.

- 1) **The Sufferings of this Present Age:** wars, rumours of wars, great earthquakes, famines and pestilences. These are found in **Matthew 24.6-8; Mark 13.7-8; Luke 21.9 – 11.**
- 2) **The Persecution of Disciples of Jesus:** and being brought before rulers. Found in **Matthew 24.9; Mark 13.9 and 13.11-13; Luke 21.12-17.** Also in **Matthew 10.17–22 and Luke 12.11–12.**
- 3) **Apostasy:** a great falling away from the faith. This is to be found in **Matthew 24.10 and 12.**
- 4) **False Religion:** there are three kinds of false religion –
 - (a) **False messiahs:** in **Matthew 24.5 and 24.23-25; Mark 13.6 and 13.21-22; Luke 21.8 and 17.21-15.**
 - (b) **False prophets:** in **Matthew 24.11 and 24.24; Mark 13.22.**
 - (c) **False signs and wonders:** in **Matthew 24.24; Mark 13.22.**
- 5) **The Siege and Capture of Jerusalem:** Found in **Matthew 24.16 – 20; Mark 13.14 – 18; Luke 21.20 – 24 and 17.31.**
- 6) **The Desolating Sacrilege:** Found in **Matthew 24.15; Mark 13.14.**
- 7) **The Great Tribulation:** Found in **Matthew 24.21; Mark 13.19.**
- 8) **The Gospel Preached throughout the World:** Found in **Matthew 24.14, and 10.18; Mark 13.10**

9) The Restoration of Jerusalem: Found in **Luke 21.24**

10) Astronomical Signs: - sun, moon and stars: Found in **Matthew 24.29; Mark 13.24 – 25; Luke 21.25.**

11) Increasing Distress: - on earth prior to the Parousia. Found in **Matthew 24.30; Mark 13.26; Luke 21.27.**

12) The Sign of the Son Of Man in the Sky: Found in **Matthew 24.30**

In addition to the Gospel references there are also references to a number of other biblical passages. These are listed below in the order in which they occur:

1. Zechariah 13 - 14
2. Daniel 12.1
3. Jeremiah 30.7
4. Matthew 24.21
5. Isaiah 66.8
6. Matthew 24.28
7. Joel 2.28
8. Isaiah 42.6
9. Isaiah 6.1
10. Isaiah 66 from verse 19
11. Matthew 29.18
12. Isaiah 19 from verse 16
13. Acts 1.8
14. Romans 11 from verse 13
15. Zechariah 4.14
16. Revelation 11
17. Ephesians 2.16
18. Luke 21.20 - 24
19. Matthew 23 from verse 35
20. Psalm 118
21. Isaiah 13.9
22. Matthew 21.33
23. Zechariah 9.9
24. Zechariah 12.10 – 13.1
25. Acts 1.6
26. Romans 11.25
27. Isaiah 13.9
28. Joel 2.30
29. Ezekiel 10
30. Matthew 24.29
31. Luke 21.25
32. Matthew 24.30 - 31
33. 1Thessalonians 4.16

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Introduction

I've had many requests to do some Bible teaching on the signs of the end times in the teaching of Jesus. In the first two Update Messages of 2013 I set out what I believe to be the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels on this subject. Many people have asked for the teaching in those recorded messages to be made available in print. This little booklet is the result. In the original recordings I tried to set out what Jesus taught his disciples about the 'end of the age' and the signs of his 'Second Coming' (the Parousia). The New Testament has many references to this subject most of which can be traced back to the teaching of Jesus himself. So the Gospels are the best starting point in any such investigation.

In this study we will be concentrating on the record of the words of Jesus in the four Gospels, especially the Synoptics, because they provide the foundation for the teaching of the Apostles which is developed in the rest of the New Testament. But we always have to remember that there is continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament and the study of the signs of the end times in this booklet is largely from an Hebraic standpoint.

Jesus was steeped in Hebraic history and the teachings of the Hebrew Prophets and the sages of Israel. He stands directly in the line of the biblical Prophets. Their words often referred to events in their own lifetime or in the near future, but those same words can often have a reference to events in the far distant future because prophecies can have more than one fulfilment. A good example is in Isaiah 24 which is sometimes referred to as the 'Little Apocalypse' of Isaiah. Reading Isaiah 24 in any of the English translations it sounds as though some catastrophic worldwide destruction is foretold such as a nuclear holocaust. Although this cannot be ruled out, if you read the chapter in the Hebrew you get a different impression.

The word EARTH occurs numerous times in Isaiah 24. The chapter begins with the statement, "*Behold, the Lord is going to lay waste the Earth and devastate it.*" Verse 3 says "*The Earth will be completely laid waste.*" Verse 4, "*The Earth dries up and*

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withers". Verse 5 *"The Earth is defiled by its people"*. Verse 6 *"Therefore a curse consumes the Earth"*. And so on... All these references to the Earth use the Hebrew word *'erets'* which throughout the Bible usually means *'the land'*, or more specifically the *'land of Israel'*. But suddenly in verse 21 of Isaiah 24 the word changes from *'erets'* to *'adamah'* which elsewhere refers to *'the earth'* as the whole world. So suddenly it changes from the land of Israel being thoroughly shaken to the statement *"In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the Kings on the Earth below"* meaning that some great judgement will come upon the land of Israel, after which the great shaking is extended to bring judgement upon the *whole world*.

This is very much in line with the teaching of Jesus. He also speaks of judgement coming upon the land of Israel and then in the next breath he is speaking about worldwide judgement. The last verse in Isaiah 24 reads *"The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem"*. If you compare Isaiah 24 with Matthew 24 you see that Jesus speaks about terrible distress coming upon Israel and then he says in Matthew 24.29 *"Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."* That is followed by his statement about the coming of the Son of Man.

In Matthew 24 Jesus was just walking away from the Temple when his disciples began eulogising about its magnificence. Jesus responded by saying that not one stone would be left on another. He and his disciples then walked across to the Mount of Olives where he could talk to them privately. They asked three questions, *"When will this happen? What will be the sign of your coming? And of the end of the age?"*

The difficulty all Bible students face in studying the record of Jesus' teaching is distinguishing which of these questions he is answering because they refer to different periods of time. The destruction of the Temple would occur during the

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lifetime of most of the disciples whereas the end of the age and the Parousia were to be in the far distant future. Most scholars assume that the end of the age and the Parousia occur at the same time.

It is significant that Jesus began his response with a warning about deception which he repeated several times. There would be false messiahs and false prophets who would deceive many before his Second Coming at the end of the age. There are, in fact, 12 such warnings in Matthew and Luke. We have seen a number of these false 'messiahs' and false prophets in recent years and as the times become more unsettled we may expect to see more of them. This is why it is essential for Christians today to know what the Bible says and to have a clear understanding of the words of Jesus: what he did and ***did not*** say, and be able to reject false teaching.

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First Sign: The Sufferings of this Present Age

Jesus said there would be wars and rumours of wars and great natural catastrophes. But when will these occur? The 20th Century witnessed more wars than any other since the beginning of recorded history. The whole nature of war changed from the clash of armies of professional soldiers to the involvement of civilian populations. This escalation of conflict encompassing whole populations has continued into the 21st Century with the 'Arab Spring' changing the face of the Middle East and North Africa, and the increasing occurrence of terrorist atrocities. The Middle East has also been disrupted by sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims, as in the tragic civil war in Syria.

During the past century, and especially in the second half of that century and beyond, there has been an increase in natural catastrophes with considerable disturbance of the normal weather patterns. Some scientists have claimed that this is an outcome of global warming, but this has yet to be confirmed. Records show that there has been a significant increase in earthquakes which have hit various parts of the world.

Other severe disturbances of the earth's surface have produced disasters such as the great earthquake in the Indian Ocean on 26th December 2004 which caused a huge tsunami that swept right around the region for hundreds of miles, killing over 230,000 people, including 168,000 in Indonesia alone. This was followed on 11th March 2011 by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake off the Pacific coast of Japan which produced the highest tsunami ever recorded when waves 10 metres high hit Japan's north-east coast killing over 18,000 people.

America has also been hit by great storms, such as Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 that flooded New Orleans and Hurricane Sandy which hit the East Coast of the USA in November 2012 causing immense damage in New Jersey and New York City. There have also been droughts and plagues which have affected large regions in Africa, bringing famine to whole populations.

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But none of these natural disasters are signs of the imminence of the Parousia. They are a characteristic of the whole period from the time of Jesus' earthly Ministry to the end of this age, culminating in his Second Coming. The words of Jesus imply that these things are going to become more frequent and more terrible as we get towards the end of the age.

Certainly these events have been increasing in frequency and intensity since the mid 20th Century and they are still continuing with the strange weather patterns that are being experienced throughout the world. These natural phenomena are coinciding with the great shaking of the nations (social and political) that has been occurring since the time of the First World War.

This great shaking of the natural creation and of the nations, as prophesied by the Hebrew prophets, links with the teaching of Jesus. The prophecy of Haggai 2.6-7 is repeated in the New Testament in Hebrews 12.26f. Haggai said, *"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord"*. The fact that this prophecy is repeated in Hebrews, which was one of the last books to have been written in the New Testament, shows that it was still referring to future events at the end of the first century. There can be no doubt that the earthquakes and storms, plagues and famines, floods and droughts will continue; and may be expected to escalate as we draw closer to the end of the age.

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Second Sign: The Persecution of the Disciples of Jesus

This began immediately after the Day of Pentecost and the birth of the church. It wasn't long before Peter was arrested and brought before the rulers for preaching the gospel in Jerusalem. For the next 30 years it was mainly the Jewish authorities who persecuted the Christians. This persecution occurred mainly in Judaea where Messianic Jewish believers vastly outnumbered the handful of Gentile believers in Jesus. Elsewhere in the Roman Empire the gospel was spreading across North Africa from Alexandria and throughout Asia Minor and Greece through the preaching of Paul. But the Roman authorities did not interfere because the disciples were Jewish and the message they were preaching was perceived to be a sect of Judaism and therefore came under the protection of the Empire whereby the Jews were allowed to pursue their own religion in return for regular prayers for the Emperor in the Temple at Jerusalem.

It was unfortunate that disputes between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome sometimes spilled out onto the streets in open conflict which brought them to the attention of the authorities. This became so acute that the Emperor Claudius issued an edict in A.D. 45 banning all Jews from Rome and this included Christians. This caused Priscilla and Aquila to move from Rome to Corinth where Paul met them.

The Jewish messianic believers began drifting back to Rome after about five years, but the damage had already been done and by this time "Christians", as they were increasingly known, were not only regarded with suspicion by the authorities but they were unpopular with the general population where there were rumours about their secret activities which were said to include drinking human blood.

Around this time the mad Emperor Nero was in conflict with the Senate over his plans for a major redesign and rebuilding programme in Rome. He could not get his own way so, according to some contemporary historians, he set fire to some buildings which spread to much of central Rome and he blamed the Christians for this arson.

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Many Christians were torched in an outbreak of savagery in which both Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom somewhere between A.D. 64 and 66. We know that Paul was in Rome shortly before that because in Acts we have a dramatic account of his shipwreck on Malta and his journey to Rome as a prisoner. Peter also was in Rome then because he makes a coded reference to it at the end of his First Letter - that is 1 Peter 5 from verse 12, where he speaks of both Silas and Mark being with him in 'Babylon' which was the codename for Rome.

There were 10 outbreaks of persecution under various emperors until the conversion of Constantine in A.D. 316. After that the main areas of conflict were *within* the church rather than from outside until after the First World War.

During the Communist era the Russians are estimated to have killed some 60 million prisoners many of whom most were Christians or Jews. From the middle of the 20th Century the major persecution of Christians has come from Muslims. From the 1970s, and the heist in world oil prices which gave wealth and power to poor underdeveloped Islamic states, there has been a change of mindset among Muslims and the rise of extreme forms of Islam. There has been a determination to dominate the world, motivated by a hatred of Jews and Christians, hence the massive rise in the number of Christians killed for their faith in the past 50 years.

Added to that, the rise of secular humanism right across the Western nations has brought increasing discrimination against Christians accompanied by a rise of anti-Christian laws which appear to be the prelude to actual persecution of Christians. Christians in the West have had it very easy for centuries and now suddenly, the tide has turned. Christianity is no longer the favoured religion but is rapidly becoming a pariah faith. The religion that at one time ruled most of the world is now scorned in the powerful nations of the West and Christians there are facing an increasingly hostile society. All these things which have happened in the past half-century are surely signs of the times in the teaching of Jesus.

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Third Sign: Apostasy

Jesus speaks of a great falling away from the faith. The 2000 year history of Christianity has been marked by periods of rapid growth and times of decline. This has been chronicled in numerous books of Christian history. In my study I have over one hundred volumes of church history on my shelves by various authors. Perhaps the most famous is by Kenneth Scott Latourette whose exhaustive study traces the spread of Christianity across the world and the conditions that gave rise to growth and decline. He died in 1966 but his work is still regarded as a benchmark in recording the story of Christianity over the centuries.

The final period of rapid growth was up to the middle of the 20th Century which was the greatest expansion since the days of the Early Church. Early in the Victorian era in the 19th Century the great European missionary age began. This led into the 20th Century and the age of American missionary activity which gathered momentum, especially in the second half of the century.

The Bible was translated into hundreds of different languages as the gospel reached many hitherto remote communities. The greatest age in the expansion of Christianity saw millions accepting the faith across Asia, Africa and South America. That expansion is still going on today while at the same time the old world of Europe and other Western nations are in spiritual decline. Europe, the continent which was at the heart of the great 19th Century mission outreach, with the determination to preach the gospel to the ends of the world in accordance with the Great Commission of Jesus, is now receiving missionaries from Africa and Asia who are determined to preach the gospel to **their** ends of the world!

This strange reversal is one of the great signs of the times. It is the result of a widespread falling away from the faith in Europe. The continent that most fully embraced the Christian faith is today the most secular continent in the world. This remarkable apostasy is foreshadowed in the teaching of Jesus in his words referring to the end times. In Matthew 24.10 Jesus says, "*At that time many will turn away*

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from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase in wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." Jesus clearly envisaged a time when many who had been believers, or were the children of believers, would deny the faith.

In Romans 1, Paul appears to be foreseeing a similar time of great falling away from the faith; a time when *"The godlessness and wickedness of men ... suppress the truth by their wickedness."* Paul notes three stages in this moral and spiritual degradation through which God gives people over to their depraved activities.

He ends by saying, *"Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."* This description seems to offer a clear presentation of the situation in northern Europe and much of the Western world where the whole civilisation has become secularised and increasingly opposed to biblical principles and the values of the Kingdom which were at one time the social foundations of the Western nations.

Fourth Sign: False Religion

From time to time throughout history there have been false 'prophets', and false 'messiahs' performing false 'signs and wonders'. False prophets usually bring predictions of good news which are very popular with many people but when they are not fulfilled they lead to disillusionment and despair.

Jeremiah had problems with false prophets. The whole of Jeremiah 28 is devoted to a conflict with the Prophet Hananiah who was giving false predictions that God would overthrow the Babylonian Empire and bring the people back to Jerusalem. Of course this was very popular but it was giving the people false hopes and Jeremiah had to speak firmly against him. In Jeremiah 28.15 we read, *"Then the Prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the Prophet, 'Listen, Hananiah! The Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am about to remove you from the face of the earth'."* Jeremiah records that two months later Hananiah died.

There were numerous false prophets around in the first century A.D., both before Jesus' ministry and throughout the rest of that century. There was a Jewish Prophet in A.D. 54 who came from Egypt preaching a popular message of revolt against the Romans. Josephus reported that about 30,000 people gathered around him on the Mount of Olives where he was claiming that the walls of Jerusalem would fall down at his command. They were unarmed and the Roman soldiers attacked and killed a lot of them but the Prophet escaped with a few followers.

In Acts 21.38 there is a reference to this. The commander of the Roman soldiers who arrested Paul said *"Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4,000 terrorists out into the desert some time ago?"* Paul replied in Greek and was easily able to dismiss the charge. There is a big difference between the 4,000 mentioned by the Roman soldier and 30,000 estimated by Josephus who probably exaggerated the number.

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There was another Prophet who began at the Feast of Tabernacles in A.D. 62 crying out prophecies of woe to Jerusalem and to the Temple. He was arrested by the Romans and flogged but as soon as he was released he began proclaiming the same message of woe. For the next seven years he kept crying out the same message on every feast day until A.D. 70. During the siege of Jerusalem he was standing on the walls of the city shouting his message when he was hit by a stone and died. He was probably a true Prophet who was standing against the many false prophets who were giving encouragement to the people saying that God would intervene to destroy the Romans.

In recent years there have been a number of false prophets. The Rev Jim Jones was an evangelical minister in California in the 1970s. He gathered a large following through his teaching that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. About 1,200 men, women and children went with him to Guyana where nearly all of them committed suicide by cyanide poisoning. Then in 1993 David Koresh of the Branch Davidian sect died in a blaze of fire along with his community at Waco in Texas. There was another man with a similar community in Switzerland that ended in tragedy. In December 2012 there were many little communities expecting the end of the world because of calculations from false prophecies.

In July 1990 I spent a whole day in the Rectory at Holy Trinity Brompton in London with John Wimber and the team from Kansas City telling them that their prophecies of a great revival beginning that autumn were false because God was calling for *repentance* in his church, not promising revival. In the previous year I had been to Kansas City to meet with these men who were teaching that a great revival was about to sweep across the world beginning in Britain in September 1990.

I still have in my possession many recordings of their prophecies and teachings saying that the generation born since the 1970s would be the last and they would witness the Second Coming of Jesus and were destined to rule the world before then. They said that Christians would take over all the institutions of power and

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would rule the nations in the name of Jesus before actually handing the kingdom to him on his return. Their teaching was all based upon false biblical teaching and false prophecies.

It may be that the history of our nation would have been changed and we would not be in the mess we are today, if the church had responded to God's call to repentance and not been misled by false prophecies. God holds his church responsible for the spiritual state of the nation, just as he held the religious leaders of Israel responsible for their nation. The tragedies in the history of Israel occurred because they did not listen to their prophets and the supreme tragedy is that they rejected their Messiah. Will similar things be said of our generation by future historians?

There are still many false prophets around predicting revival. But the word of the Lord since the 1980s has been that there will be no revival in Britain without repentance in the church. I believe that is still the word of the Lord because it is not God's intention to revive the corrupt and deeply flawed institutions of our decaying civilisation including the institutional church such as we have today. These structures have to crumble and die before there can be a resurrection of new life.

Yes! There will come a day when there will be a new spiritual awakening; when the Holy Spirit moves again in this nation. But it will not be a day to revive the things of the past. It will be a new day when the Spirit of God brings new life out of the ashes of our crumbling secular humanist civilisation and the unbelieving church that is married to the world.

Fifth Sign: The Siege and Capture of Jerusalem

In Jesus' words this clearly referred to his knowledge of what was going to happen in the lifetime of many of his hearers. It was less than 40 years later that his prediction that not one stone of the Temple would be left upon another became a reality. But his grief as he approached Jerusalem in the final week of his earthly life can still be felt as we read his words nearly 2000 years later. It is recorded at the end of Matthew 23. *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’.”*

Jesus foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem in the same way as Jeremiah had similar foreknowledge of what would happen in 586 B.C. Luke, in chapter 19, records Jesus actually weeping over Jerusalem. *‘As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. The day will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God’s coming to you.”*

As he went to his crucifixion, Luke 23 records that Jesus said to the women who followed him, *“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.”*

Jesus knew what was coming. He could see all around him the faithlessness of the leaders of Israel who were unable to discern the signs of the times and therefore were unable to recognise his Messiahship. They were steeped in the traditions

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handed down to them by their sages but this was acting as a blindfold over their eyes so that they were unable to see the truth.

Jesus knew that this would lead them into the turbulent times that lay ahead when rebellious spirits would arise to mislead the nation and foment rebellion against the Romans which would lead to disaster and to the slaughter of more than half 1 million people in Judaea. He knew that the Roman legions would be ruthless in their recapture of Jerusalem and that the Temple, along with all the major buildings would be destroyed. Jesus knew that these things did not have to happen but that they would be the outcome of the faithlessness of the people of Israel and their leaders.

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Sixth Sign: The Desolating Sacrilege

“When you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains.” When Mark wrote those words it could rapidly lead to death for anyone who openly opposed Rome, hence the coded reference. As part of the pact with Rome the Jews were allowed to pursue their own religion on condition that daily prayers were said for the Roman Emperor in the Temple.

In A.D. 40 Caligula attempted to get a huge statue of himself installed in the Temple which caused outrage and Caligula backed down in the face of violent opposition. It may be that Mark had this in mind when he wrote his Gospel some 20 years later. Of course, it reminded everyone in Jerusalem of when Antiochus Epiphanies in 167 B.C. actually sacrificed a pig on the altar in the Temple which sparked the Maccabean Revolution.

In A.D. 64 Florus became procurator of Judaea. He was a cruel dictator who openly persecuted the Jews, depriving them of civil liberties, and then he robbed the Temple taking money from the Treasury. There was a public outcry and his troops attacked the protestors, destroying many houses in Jerusalem, scourging and crucifying the occupants.

This led to further disturbances and the outbreak of war in A.D. 66 which was to last four years. Throughout that time of conflict with Rome, Jerusalem was torn apart by civil war. The city was controlled by three groups of extremists who fought each other. Simon bar Giora controlled the Upper City with an army of 15,000. John Gisehala controlled the Temple courtyard and part of the Lower City with a band of 6,000 and there were a further 2,400 zealots actually in the Temple led by Eleazar bar Simon.

The Romans made three attempts to retake Jerusalem. In the first they set up camp on Mount Scopus but were forced to withdraw after a week, losing 5,000 soldiers

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when attacked by Simon bar Giora. In the spring of A.D. 67 the Roman General Vespasian with his son Titus were sent by Nero and an army of 60,000 men. Galilee was cruelly suppressed and they pressed on to Jerusalem slowly overcoming resistance across Judaea. News of Nero's death in June A.D. 69 led to Vespasian being proclaimed Emperor by his legions, so Titus took over the siege of Jerusalem, eventually breaching the walls in May A.D. 70.

The warring Jewish factions now united to resist the enemy and fighting went on in the city from May to 26 September when the city of Jerusalem was sacked and burned. Titus had the Temple and the City walls razed to the ground killing 600,000 and taking 97,000 prisoners into slavery. Josephus says that more than 1 million were killed but that is probably an exaggeration. The Romans had marked their victory by sacrificing to their gods on the altar of the Temple before destroying it. The '*abomination of desolation*' had arrived less than 40 years after Jesus' prophecy.

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Seventh Sign: The Great Tribulation

We come now to the seventh sign which is the Great Tribulation. The terrible events in Jerusalem that occurred in the Jewish revolt against Rome in A.D. 66 – 70 and the second revolt in A.D. 135 (known as the first and second Jewish wars) when tens of thousands were slaughtered by the Romans, were surely what Jesus had in mind as the great tragedy which would befall Jerusalem and the people of Judaea.

Many scholars also think this is prophesied in Zechariah 13 where it says that two-thirds of the population would be struck down and even the remaining third would be refined as in a fire. But it should be remembered that prophetic visions can have more than one fulfilment. Many scholars believe that the words of Jesus and the prophecies of Zechariah 13 and 14 may still refer to some future events.

This view is reinforced by Daniel 12.1 which says *“There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered.”* And Jeremiah 30.7 says, *“How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.”* Both of these prophecies speak of an expectation that God will intervene to save his people. Some scholars believe that the Nazi Holocaust killing 6 million Jews in the 1930s and 40s may have been the beginning of the ‘time of trouble for Jacob’. But there was no intervention by God at the time of the Holocaust, despite the prayers of millions.

The Zechariah prophecies also indicate that there will be an intervention from God at the time of the great tribulation. But the fact that an intervention did **not** take place when the Romans sacked Jerusalem, or when hundreds lost their lives at Masada, or at the time of the Central European Holocaust, leads many scholars today to believe that all these prophecies of a Great Tribulation have *yet to be fulfilled*. On the basis of Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 from verse 21 he would appear to be

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prophesying something much more than the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. He said *“For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equalled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”*

We may add a number of other prophecies both from the Prophets and the New Testament Apostles all of which refer to a time of Tribulation. Jeremiah’s prophecy of the time of trouble for Jacob needs to be taken in context as it leads to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the re-gathering of the people of Israel and the establishment of the New Covenant which, although Jeremiah said it was to be made with the ‘house of Israel’, through Jesus it has been opened to the Gentiles.

It is also important to note the prophecy of Isaiah 66.8, which reads, *“Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in Labour than she gives birth to her children. Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery? says the Lord”*

Many scholars believe that this prophecy was fulfilled when the State of Israel was birthed in a single day in May 1948 with the vote of the United Nations; while others believe that it will not be fulfilled until the Jews become believers in Jesus. What we are seeing now with all the hostile Arab nations gathering around Israel is very much like the situation described in Zechariah 14 which means that there is further trouble ahead for Jacob. But there will be some form of divine intervention which brings the Jews to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. Are we witnessing in our own lifetime the fulfilment of what Jesus foresaw as a time of great tribulation?

Many people in Israel today believe that the Arab nations are preparing for war against Israel. In Iran, President Ahmadinejad has been threatening to attack Israel for a long time but he has not had widespread Arab support. Today the situation is different, since the so-called ‘Arab Spring’, Egypt and the whole of North Africa is

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now ruled by the Muslim Brotherhood who are hostile towards Israel. If Assad falls in Syria and the Muslim Brotherhood take over that nation, they will join forces with Hezbollah in Lebanon who are supported by Iran and Israel will be nearly surrounded.

At the time of writing, only Jordan remains friendly to Israel, but the Muslim Brotherhood are seeking to undermine the Jordanian monarchy. If they succeed in provoking a revolution, there is really no chance of Israel avoiding war. The question is - what can we expect to see in the near future? Is God warning us to be prepared for the times which Jesus foretold? Are we near to the Great Tribulation that is spoken of in the Bible? The answer, of course, is that no one knows. My own reading of Scripture in the light of past history and contemporary events, leads me to the conclusion that the 'Great Tribulation', when both Jew and Gentile believers will suffer, is still in the future and may very well be in the *near future!*

Eighth Sign: The Gospel Preached in all the World

So now it's time to turn from the bad news to the good news! The eighth of Jesus' twelve 'signs of the times' is that the gospel will be preached in all the world. He says, in Matthew 24.14, *"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."* We have to remember that Jesus knew the Hebrew Scriptures very well. Right from the time when he was a 12-year-old boy, and his parents found him in the Temple discussing theology with the Rabbis, Jesus studied the writings of the Prophets and the sages of Israel.

You can be sure that he knew the prophecy of Joel 2.28 *"And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."* Jesus knew that the Day of Pentecost would come and he was already preparing his disciples for that day which would set the scene for the time when the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, would speak through the lives of men and women throughout the world. Jesus also knew the prophecies of Isaiah 42.6 to the people of Israel, *"I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people, and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind and free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."*

Jesus knew that this was prophesied of the Jewish people. He knew that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were God's chosen instruments to bring the revelation of his nature and purposes to the Gentile nations. He also knew that the whole nation of Israel - even though they are the servant of God would reject him as Messiah and in so doing they would be scattered among the nations, lost in a Gentile wilderness for many centuries.

But in the fullness of time, the day would come when this prophecy of Isaiah would be fulfilled; the Jewish people will embrace Yeshua as their Messiah and join with

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their Gentile brothers and sisters in proclaiming the message of Yeshua to the nations! We know that Jesus was familiar with Isaiah 61 which he read in the synagogue at Nazareth, *“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor”*.

Jesus would also have known the prophecy in Isaiah 66 from verse 19, of believers being sent out to all the nations who had not yet heard the word of God. *“They will proclaim my glory to the nations. And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord.”* Surely this is what Jesus had in mind when he gave the Great Commission to his disciples. In Matthew 29.18, Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

I have no doubt that Jesus also had in mind some of the other Hebraic scriptures prophesying that the day will come when all nations will hear the word of the Lord. I will just mention a few of them. There is an amazing prophecy in Isaiah 19 from verse 16 which speaks of both Egypt and Assyria, the latter of which is Iraq and Iran, coming to know the Lord.

Of course, there have been Christians in Egypt since New Testament times and by the third century the whole of North Africa had Christian churches in all its towns and cities. Today there are about 8 million Coptic Christians in Egypt in a population of 85 million but many have been fleeing the country since the terrible bombing of a church on Christmas Day 2011, followed by the Muslim Brotherhood gaining control of Egypt in 2012.

From the Day of Pentecost, when 3,000 accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour in Jerusalem, the church expanded rapidly as the disciples responded to the Great Commission and obeyed the strategy Jesus gave to them in Acts 1.8, to begin in Jerusalem, move out into Judaea and Samaria and then on to the ends of the earth.

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Despite the 10 periods of brutal persecution during the first three centuries of Christianity, by the time the Emperor Constantine accepted the faith in A.D. 316, the gospel was being preached throughout the Roman Empire. Expansion continued in the East, especially spreading in South India and reaching China.

A Syrian monk began preaching the gospel in the imperial court of China in A.D. 635 and three years later the Emperor T'ai-tsung issued an edict saying that the Christian gospel should be taught throughout China. Of course, we know that did not make much impact as the gospel was seen as a Western religion right up until the 20th Century when the Marxist revolution destroyed the hold that ancestor worship had upon the nation and the gospel became indigenised in a small number of survivors of the Communist persecution.

The believers in Jesus came out of the furnace on fire with the gospel. Today the church in China is growing at a faster rate than anywhere else in the world. It is estimated that there are at least 100 million committed believers in China today and they are already sending their missionaries to their ends of the world - which is Europe.

But the gospel did not only spread to the East; from the time of Constantine's conversion it slowly moved across Europe. Britain is the only part of northern Europe that has had the gospel from apostolic times. But by the year 1,000 the whole of northern Europe and Russia had received the gospel. Then after the birth of Islam in the 7th Century which spread across the Middle East and North Africa, Europe became the main centre of Christianity culminating in the great missionary movement of the 19th Century and early 20th Century.

Today the church throughout Europe and the Western nations is in sharp decline, while by contrast there is massive growth across Asia, South America and Africa south of the Sahara. In fact, it is hard to tell where the centre of Christianity is today. It is certainly not in Europe, but the huge growth in China, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia and India is at least as great as that in Africa.

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But, if you really want to understand the biblical significance of the spread of the gospel you need to look, not at Asia or Africa, but at the Middle East and to Israel in particular where more Jews are becoming believers in Jesus than at any time in the past 2,000 years. The church, from the time of Pentecost, began as virtually 100 percent Jewish and for 100 years continued to look to Jerusalem as the apostolic centre of the faith.

When Jerusalem was destroyed, after the defeat of the bar Kokva revolution in A.D. 135, almost exactly 100 years after the crucifixion and resurrection, the church had not only spread across the Roman Empire but the number of Gentiles now outnumbered Jewish believers in Jesus. By the time of the Council of Nicaea, called by the Emperor Constantine in A.D. 325, there was not a single Hebrew speaker to uphold the Hebraic teaching of Jesus and the Hebrew culture which were the foundations of the gospel.

Constantine was a hater of the Jews and his anti-Semitism took an increasing hold upon the Western church which led to sporadic outbreaks of violence across Europe including Britain. At the time of the Reformation, Luther urged the German Princes to expel all Jews from their territories. Luther's anti-Semitism is known to have influenced Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. But now, it is the older Jews, Holocaust survivors and Russian Jews, survivors of Communist persecution, who are responding to the gospel in Israel. This is surely the most significant of all the signs of the times.

There are many similarities between Joseph, the son of Jacob, and Jesus. His brothers were jealous of him and he was rejected by them and sold into slavery in Egypt where he became greatly honoured among the Gentiles. Then in a time when the whole region was suffering from famine, his brothers came to Egypt for food. They came to the Gentiles for survival. Having ensured that all his brothers were in front of him Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and wept loudly for joy as he embraced them.

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Jesus also was rejected by his brothers and became great among the Gentiles. Today Jesus is revealing himself to his brothers, many of whom have revelations of him quite independently of any evangelism, and he is no doubt weeping for joy as they say “Yeshua ha Ma’shea”. Perhaps the day is in sight when we will see the fulfilment of Paul’s vision in Romans 11 where he speaks of all Israel coming to faith. He says from verse 13 that the time will come when they will be grafted back into “*their own olive tree*”. He says “*Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.*” This is surely a prophetic statement of great significance.

When I first went to Israel there were only a handful of Messianic Fellowships in the country. Today there are many and there are thousands of believers in Jesus. This raises the question, are we nearing the day when the full number of Gentiles will have come into the Kingdom?

Are we getting near to the day, foreseen by the Prophet Zechariah in 4.14, where he receives the word “*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty*” and he sees a vision of a man with a plumb line in his hand and two olive trees on the left and right of a lampstand, and he hears a voice saying “*These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth*”. These words are repeated in Revelation 11 as the ‘two witnesses’ who are given power to prophesy to the world. In Paul’s teaching they are described as Jew and Gentile coming together to create ‘*one new man*’ out of the two; reconciling both to God through the cross and putting to death their hostility as in Ephesians 2.16. In this way Israel will fulfil God’s intention for her to be ‘*a light to the Gentiles*’.

Ninth Sign: The Restoration of Jerusalem

This leads us neatly to the ninth sign, 'The restoration of Jerusalem'. When we looked at the fifth sign, 'the siege and capture of Jerusalem', we read Luke 21.20 to 24 where Jesus said *"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near."* He warned the people of Judaea to flee to the mountains and those in the city to get out. He said *"There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations."* This was fulfilled in the terrible revenge taken by the Roman army following the four-year insurrection against Roman rule that began in A.D. 66, not much more than 30 years after Jesus' warnings.

We may discount the statement of Hebrew historian Josephus that more than 1 million Jews in Judaea were killed, as his figures are generally thought to be an exaggeration, but most historians say that more than half 1 million lost their lives. Josephus was actually the commander of the Jewish forces opposing the Romans, but after the surrender he was brought before the Roman General Vespasian where he prophesied to him that he would become the next Caesar. Vespasian was impressed: he treated him well and he was given the freedom to write his histories. There certainly was great distress right across Judaea with a vast number killed exactly as Jesus said. But his warnings concluded with the words *"Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."*

It is surely significant that Jerusalem, from that day in A.D. 70, until recent times, has been under Gentile rule. Jerusalem was not returned into Jewish hands until the Six-Day War in 1967. When Israeli tanks entered the city of Jerusalem on that day it appeared to fulfil the 2,000 year old prophecy of Jesus. Some scholars differ from this interpretation. They say this will not be fulfilled so long as the Muslims have control of the Temple Mount where the Golden Dome and the Al Aqsa Mosque dominate. Will there be another conflict when the Jews will regain control of the

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whole of Jerusalem before the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled? No one knows the answer to this question.

In Matthew 23 from verse 35 Jesus charged the scribes and Pharisees with hypocrisy as he foresaw all the terrible bloodshed that was going to come upon Jerusalem. *“I tell you the truth”, he said “all this will come upon this generation.”* Jesus wept over Jerusalem, ending with the words *“You will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed it is he who comes in the name of the Lord’.”* He was quoting from Psalm 118 which also has the words *“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone”* which Jesus quoted linked with his parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21.

The use of this Psalm shows that Jesus had some form of *spiritual* restoration in mind. The same words were used by the crowds at his entry into Jerusalem where Jesus was seen to be living out the Messianic Prophecy of Zechariah 9. 9 *“Shout daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey.”* If we go a little farther in Zechariah and look at the end of chapter 12 to the beginning of chapter 13 we see the prophecy *“They will look upon me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child... On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity”.*

It may be that this was fulfilled when a Roman soldier casually thrust his spear into the body of Jesus to check whether he was dead on the cross. Blood and water came out symbolising the coming together of what John the Baptist foresaw, at the water baptism of Jesus, that he was also baptised with Holy Spirit. The crucifixion took place, according to John’s Gospel, on the day of preparation for the Passover when the Paschal lambs were prepared. Jesus was the Lamb without blemish, whose blood was shed on the cross, to atone for the sins of the world.

The teaching of Jesus shows that he was expecting some kind of spiritual restoration of Israel which would be linked with the restoration of Jerusalem to the

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Jews after a period of Gentile rule. That has not yet fully happened, but with many Jews becoming believers in Jesus after a period of 2,000 years, that day may be near. Something very significant is happening in our lifetime.

It may be useful to summarise what we are saying in this ninth sign.

The Apostles were expecting a restoration of Israel which is evident from their last question to Jesus in Acts 1.6-7, just before his Ascension. They asked "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*" Jesus dismissed this with the warning not to try forecasting dates and times over which only the Father has authority. But the disciples must have gleaned this understanding of a restoration of Israel from the teaching of Jesus.

Paul also believed there would come a day when the people of Israel would come to faith in Jesus. In Romans 11.25 he echoes Jesus' words that this will not happen until "*the full number of the Gentiles has come in*". With many Jews in Israel now becoming believers in Jesus, it looks as though we have reached the times which both Jesus and the Apostles foresaw.

I believe that the day will come, and may be already in sight, when Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus will be the two witnesses combining to take the gospel to the nations. It may be that they will be the reapers of a spiritual harvest which will come out of the great shaking of the nations and the times of distress which are coming upon the world in the days leading up to the Second Coming of our Lord.

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Tenth Sign: Astronomical Signs

Now we come to the 10th sign of the times which is astronomical signs in the sun moon and stars. In the Old Testament astronomical signs either accompany or are used as warnings of momentous events on Earth as for example in Isaiah 13.9, *“See, the day of the Lord is coming – a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger – to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.”* There is a similar statement in Joel 2.30 following the prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which says *“I will show wonders in the heavens and on the Earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The Sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”*

The birth of Jesus was also heralded by a sign in the sky and the appearance of a star which astrologers from the East followed. According to Matthew’s account of the nativity they were led to Bethlehem where they presented gifts to mark the occasion. (Matthew 2.1-12)

In any interpretation of signs, particularly astronomical signs, we have to be particularly careful because history is littered with false interpretations, such as the famous misinterpretation of the Oracle that led Croesus the Lydian to expect an easy victory but which led to defeat in which Cyrus the Persian overthrew the Greek Empire.

A similar misinterpretation is recorded by Josephus just before the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70. He says that someone had brought a cow to be sacrificed which gave birth to a lamb in the Temple courtyard. A violent storm raged over Jerusalem and that night the great Eastern gate of the Temple swung open. It was a massive brass door which took 20 men to move it; and when shut it had huge iron bolts which were sunk to a great depth into a solid block of stone at the threshold. At the sixth hour of the night this

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gate swung open amid the sound of rushing wind sweeping through the Temple. The Temple watchman ran and reported to the captain of the guard who brought out the night watch to push it shut. This was interpreted as a *good sign* of God sending a blessing. But the fact that the Temple gate swung open without human effort accompanied by a great wind was more in line with the time when the word '*Ichabod*' (*glory departed*) was given to Ezekiel - symbolising the presence of God leaving the Temple just before its destruction by the Babylonians in 596 BC. Josephus also recorded that throughout Israel strange visions were seen in the sky of a bright light in the shape of a sword and a comet streaking across the sky. This cannot be dismissed as mere fable because the Roman historian Tacitus records a similar account of strange happenings in Jerusalem. He writes,

“In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armour. A sudden lightning flash from the clouds lit up the Temple. The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure. Few people placed a sinister interpretation upon this. The majority were convinced that the ancient Scriptures of their priests alluded to the present as the very time when they would triumph and from Judaea would go forth men destined to rule the world.”

Tacitus went on to sneer at the Jewish religion saying that even their calamities failed to open their eyes to the truth. Sadly, this was a prophetic statement from a heathen. But will this be said of our generation; that we failed to heed the warning signs that God sent to us? There have been so many false prophecies from church leaders in recent times, as we noted earlier, particularly predicting revival when God has been calling for repentance.

In Matthew 24.29 Jesus says “*Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.*” I have to confess that I really don't know

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the significance of these signs in the heavenlies and I never like to make statements unless I am confident of their veracity. I do know that there will be, in the near future, two solar eclipses and four lunar eclipses - all of them occurring on Jewish Holy Days. A number of biblical scholars including Lance Lambert believe this to be of significance. But as far as I am aware no one has yet interpreted the signs.

The Lunar Eclipses will occur on –

Passover April 15, 2014

Feast of Tabernacles October 8, 2014

Passover April 4, 2015

Feast of Tabernacles September 28, 2015

The Solar Eclipses also occur on Jewish Holy Days –

Adar 29/Nisan 1(New Year) March 20, 2015

Feast of Trumpets September 13, 2015

I have yet to see a specific prophecy based upon these astronomical signs. Maybe revelation will be given to us before the dates when they are due to occur. If God is sending a special warning to us, concerning some momentous event in the near future, we should take this very seriously indeed in the highly dangerous times in which we live. In John 16.12 – 13 Jesus says to his disciples, *“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

Clearly, Jesus knew that his disciples could only cope with a certain amount of information regarding how God’s purposes would be fulfilled in the future. But Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will come and there is no indication anywhere in the New Testament that the Spirit of God would be withdrawn before the Second Coming.

We may therefore conclude with confidence that the Holy Spirit is still with us today guiding the disciples of Jesus when we learn to listen to him.

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In the same statement Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit “*will tell you what is yet to come*”. This does *not* mean that he will tell us everything; because, as with the first disciples, there are many things that we could not bear. But this promise means that God will reveal to us things that are necessary for our guidance in fulfilling the Great Commission, and enabling us to be prepared to stand during times of great stress. If these solar and lunar eclipses are of great significance we may be sure that revelation will be given to us in the timing of the Lord.

This should be an important subject for prayer groups.

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Eleventh Sign: Increasing Distress

The eleventh sign is - increasing distress on earth prior to the Parousia. This sign is found in Luke 21.25, *“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”* This reference to increasing distress on earth has to be seen in the context of Jesus’ earlier warnings about wars and revolutions, kingdom rising against kingdom and great earthquakes, famines and pestilences.

The difficulty we face in interpreting his warnings is due to the fact, to which we referred in the Introduction, that there are different time frames here. Jesus was warning his disciples of the catastrophe that was going to happen in their lifetime in Jerusalem and Judaea. He was also telling them that for a long period there were going to be wars and earthquakes and famines, but these were not to be interpreted as signs of the end of the age.

In the same discourse Jesus described the period leading up to his own Second Coming. He referred to increasing distress upon the earth, the roaring and tossing of the sea, and the heavenly bodies being shaken. These, of course, are incidents that have happened at various times in history when there have been extraordinary storms or, as happened a few years ago when a tsunami shook the whole region around the South China Sea from Indonesia to China. Then more recently another tsunami devastated an area of Japan and early in 2013 a comet passed close to the Earth’s orbit and part of another one landed in Russia doing considerable damage.

There have also been great storms such as the one that flattened New Orleans and the apocalyptic scenes of devastation left by Hurricane Sandy the great storm that struck the east coast of the United States on 29th October 2012. A 14 feet high wall of water hit a vast area from New Jersey to Manhattan, flooding homes, streets, and subways, and bringing New York City to a standstill. We have also seen an

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increasing number of earthquakes and other natural disasters in the past three or four decades. These may be of significance although I don't think we have yet reached the stage when there is great apprehension of what is coming upon the world which is what Jesus said would happen.

My own interpretation of Jesus' prophecy of a time of great distress is that it does not only refer to natural disasters, but to the great shaking of the nations which has been gathering momentum since the early part of the 20th Century beginning with the First World War. There has been a lot of anxiety throughout the world about the economy since the great shaking of the banks and financial institutions began in 2008. In Britain there is fear that we will not be able to continue to pay the huge cost of welfare and the ever increasing cost of health, especially if new immigrants from Eastern Europe continue to come into the country. All our social institutions are shaking and causing anxiety which may all be part of the distress which will grow in the coming days.

There are rumours in the City of London that Russia and China are plotting the downfall of the American dollar. They know that America has the biggest national debt in the world and if called to account the American banks could not cover their debts. They are awaiting the day to pull the plug on the dollar which will cause the whole of the Western economy to collapse. This is well known, not only among leaders in America but also in Europe and this is one of the reasons why the Eurozone leaders have been desperately trying to maintain the Euro and guard against default from Greece or Ireland or Spain or Cyprus.

Of course our politicians in Britain know all this but none of them will speak about it openly. They know that our own economy is in desperate trouble as our national debt is far greater than our income. It is growing every day and can never be paid off however much we delay the evil day by greater cuts in public spending. Unless our industries can produce more and sell our goods overseas there is no chance of staving off bankruptcy.

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But all the nations in the Western world are in a similar situation. They none of them want to be the first to collapse and they all know that if one goes down all the others will follow. It's like the Dam Busters. They knew they only had to create a small hole in the dan wall and the weight of the water pouring through would do the rest and bring about the collapse of the entire dam.

But if the economies of the Western nations are in danger, so too are their social structures. We have already seen signs of social stress in many parts of Europe where there is high unemployment and hopelessness among the masses.

Increasingly the people will challenge the authorities and the fear of law and order breakdown is already there among the leaders of the nations. I believe that all these fears lead up to a time of unparalleled distress among the nations which Jesus foresaw in the last days of this age leading up to the Second Coming of our Lord.

Twelfth Sign: The Sign of the Son of Man in the Sky

So we come now to the last of the twelve signs – the sign of the Son of Man in the sky. Matthew 24.30 speaks of the sign of the Son of Man appearing in the sky and all nations will mourn. This is the same phrase as is used in Zechariah 12.10 which refers to the nation of Israel looking upon the One they had pierced. The context is that God will pour out upon *“the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication”* and as they look upon the One they have pierced. They will *“grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a first born son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great.”* This certainly seems to be a prophecy of many Jews in Jerusalem and Judaea becoming believers in Jesus, the One who was pierced. This may be just starting to happen, beginning with the Russian Jews.

The statement Jesus made that is recorded in Matthew 24.30 is that all nations will see his sign in the sky. *“They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”* This, of course, could not have happened in former generations, but with television and the incredible speed of mass communications today through the social media as well as through professional news networks, we can see things happening in any part of the world instantaneously.

There is certainly evidence that from the 2nd Century onwards Christians have believed that the sign of the Son of Man will be a brightly lit cross in the sky. There is some evidence that this belief began with Cyril of Jerusalem, one of the Early Church Fathers.

Some scholars believe that this event will mark the return of Jesus for his church which will remove them from the earth before the great tribulation takes place. Since the rise of popular 20th century teaching this has been referred to as ‘the Rapture’. This is largely based upon Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4.16-17. There is nothing specific in Jesus’ teaching to support this and Matthew 24.29 speaks of the Parousia taking place *“immediately **after** the distress of those days.”* Jesus may, of course, have been meaning that the *“distress of those days”* refers to the

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persecution of believers which precedes the wrath of God being poured out upon all nations. But Jesus' statement urging his followers to be watchful so that they can *"escape all that is about to happen"* (Luke 21.36) is preceded by verse 32 *"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."* Most scholars regard this passage to be part of Jesus' answer to the question about the destruction of the Temple which was fulfilled in A.D.70.

We will all no doubt know the truth about the Second Coming of Jesus one day but one thing is certain – our salvation does not depend upon whether or not we believe in the Rapture. It is far better to be prepared to stand firm in the faith through the testing times ahead than to be relying upon avoiding trouble.

Another popular belief in the Early Church was that the return of Jesus would be hailed by a loud trumpet call. Paul refers to it in 1Thessalonians 4.16 where he says, *"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the Archangel and the trumpet call of God."* Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 24.31 *"And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, and from one end of the heavens to the other."* This is a clear reference to Jesus, at his Parousia, gathering the true believers in his church, both those who are alive at his return and scattered across the world, and those who have died, The loud shout and the trumpet call are believed by many to be a reference to Hebraic marriage customs whereby the bride would be expecting the groom but would not know exactly at what time he would come.

No one knows when these things will happen. Jesus said that only the Father knows the times and dates which he has *"set by his own authority"*. The fact that the times and dates are already set is significant! It means that we can be absolutely sure that all these events in the teaching of Jesus undoubtedly will take place. Jesus told his own disciples to be always alert and watchful. He told parables to illustrate the need to be watchful. *"Watch and pray!"* He said. This is his word to his church today.

Series Objective

The purpose of this series of mini-books is to outline the biblical basis of the teaching used in Issachar Ministries.

The vision underlying Issachar Ministries is that of equipping the church to be the prophet to the world and to fulfil the mission of Christ given in the Great Commission. For this purpose the Holy Spirit has been given to the church bringing new life, power and spiritual gifts to all believers.

A major objective is to mobilise the spiritual resources of the church by promoting greater understanding of spiritual gifts enabling individual believers to recognise and use their gifts.

A further objective is to enable Christians to understand the signs of the times, to listen to God, to guard against deception, and to know what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches.

Summary of this booklet

“The Twelve Signs of the Times in the Teaching of Jesus” is a biblical study of Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels relating to his statements on events leading up to the end of the age and the Parousia. The 12 signs are: –

- 1) **The Sufferings of this Present Age**
- 2) **The Persecution of Disciples**
- 3) **Apostasy**
- 4) **False Religion**
 - (a) False messiahs:
 - (b) False prophets:
 - (c) False signs and wonders:
- 5) **The Siege and Capture of Jerusalem**
- 6) **The Desolating Sacrilege**
- 7) **The Great Tribulation**
- 8) **The Gospel Preached throughout the World**
- 9) **The Restoration of Jerusalem**
- 10) **Astronomical Signs**
- 11) **Increasing Distress**
- 12) **The Sign of the Son of Man in the Sky**



The Rev Dr Clifford Hill MA. BD. Ph.D. exercises an international ministry that is both prophetic and evangelistic. He is an ordained minister with many years pastoral experience of churches in inner-city areas of London. He and his wife Monica founded the Newham Community Renewal Programme in the East End of London. Together they founded Moggerhanger Park as a Ministry centre and base for their work through Issachar Ministries. They also carry responsibility for the work of the Lords and Commons Family and Child Protection Group of which Clifford is the Convenor. Dr Hill is the author of more than 40 books ranging from community relations to biblical commentaries.



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