

BIBLICAL SIGNS OF THE END TIMES

It seems every time there is a crisis in the world—war, famine, epidemic, earthquake, tsunami, ecological or economical upheaval, *et al*—a significant portion of the Christian world asks if we could be living in the last days. Christians have been asking this question ever since the disciples ask Jesus, “What will be the sign of your coming, and the end of the age?” (Mtt. 24:3). It is normal and natural to wonder. So let’s see what the Bible really says about this topic, rather than be taken in by the teachings of so many of today’s pop eschatologists.

First, let’s come to an understanding of terms. In the Bible, the “last days” does not mean the same thing as the “end of the age.” We are told the last days began when Jesus first came to this earth (Heb. 1:2). Nearly two thousand years may not seem like the last days to us, but to God “a thousand years is [as] one day” (II Pet. 3:8). So the more accurate question is: Are we living at the end of the age? To what “age” is the Bible referring? It is the Christian age in which God patiently offers His love, forgiveness, grace, and salvation to all those who reach out and accept it. One day this age will come to an end and culminate with God’s judgment. This will be the time of God’s wrath upon a rebellious and disobedient mankind.

Let’s return to the disciples’ question about signs indicating the end of the age and examine Jesus’ answer. Here follows a harmonized text of the Olivet Prophecy (Mtt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21) taken from the synoptic gospels,

So Jesus answered, beginning to say to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying: ‘I am the Christ, and the time draws near,’ and they will deceive many. Therefore, you should not go after them. But when you hear of wars, rumors of wars, and disturbances, do not be terrified. See, do not be troubled, for all these things must come to pass first, but the end is not immediately.”

Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in different places, famines, *and* disease epidemics. And there will be troubles, fearful sights, and great signs in the sky. But all these *are* the beginning of birth pangs.”

Jesus described the general conditions in the world over the next two thousand years. There would be false prophets, wars, natural disasters, and fearful times. Jesus was trying to prepare his followers for the long haul, but they have never gotten it. Ever since, every time something awesome or fearful happens in the world, some people declare “the end is near.” Jesus plainly told us that these things are **not** specifically signs of the end.

You may notice that at the core of Jesus’ words: religious deception, war, famine, disease, there seems to be a **sequence**. American president George Washington once wrote insightfully, “Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind, those which are caused by a difference of sentiments in religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing, and ought most to be deprecated.” Washington felt that religious differences have always been the chief cause of war between peoples and nations. And famine and disease nearly always follow in war’s wake.

We see this same sequence in Revelation 6:1-8 where the first four seals are opened to reveal “four horsemen.” We see a white horse of religious deception, a red horse of war, a black horse of famine, and a pale horse of death or disease. Are these symbolic images only to be understood in an historical

sense as were Jesus' words? The apostle Paul wrote, "But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (II Tim. 3:13). We may need to consider that Jesus words may also have prophetic end time significance. Perhaps there will be an **accelerated** aspect to these four conditions. As religious deception in the world "grow[s] worse and worse," so will war, famine, and disease. While we certainly see these very conditions in the world today, it would be very imprecise to dogmatically pronounce that these are signs of the end times. They may be, but only in the general sense.

So does the Bible give us any specific signs to look for which will indicate the end of the age? Most definitely, but the problem is that many of those signs have been covered up by false teachings. What a big surprise! We are told that Satan "deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). And further, he can influence "false" Christian teachers so they may "deceive" faithful Christians if they allow it (Mtt. 24:24; II Cor. 11:13-15). Three of the most significant false teachings which hide an understanding of the biblical signs of the end of the age are: the Rapture, Pre-Millennialism, and the belief that the Jewish state of Israel is the restored Israel of end time prophecy. Sadly, these teachings are believed by many Christians, especially so-called Evangelicals

These three teachings all have two things in common: they hide the activities of Satan in the end time; they hide the fate of Christians in the end time. If you were Satan, wouldn't you most like to cover up what you were going to do to those you hate the most—God's people? And so he has! Let's begin to see how.

Pre-Millennialism is the belief that we are living **prior** to the return of Jesus, after which he will set up an earthly kingdom which will last a thousand years—millennium. The foundation for this belief is found in Revelation 20:1-10. In this passage we read that Satan will be bound at the beginning of the millennium (v1-3), so it follows according to this belief that he has not yet been bound. Then we are told that at the end of the millennium he will be released (v7-10).

Verses 4-6 describe the conditions of the millennium. What do we see? First, the book of Revelation is largely symbolic, and therefore should not be interpreted literally. If we look for **symbolic** meaning with a Spirit-led mind we will see a description of the present Christian age. We see the kingly saints sitting on thrones reigning over sin. We see them judging, discerning between good and evil. We see them as priests offering spiritual sacrifices. We see them struggling against the Satanic kingdoms of this world—"beast", with many being persecuted and even martyred for standing up for their faith. We see this age lasting a thousand years, which is biblical symbolic language which simply means a long time, followed by the resurrection of the saints to immortality. (For more details on Pre-Millennialism, you may wish to read the article entitled "What is the Millennium Doctrine?")

With that understanding in place, it now follows that Satan was bound at the beginning of the Christian age nearly two thousand years ago, for which there is ample biblical evidence. (For that evidence you may wish to read the articles entitled "What Did Jesus Accomplish? Part I: Triumphed Over Satan" and "Has Satan Been Released?"). So now we may conclude that one of the most important biblical signs of the end times is the release of Satan at the end of the Christian age. This is what the Pre-Millennialism teaching hides, just as Satan hoped it would. In the passage in Revelation 20 we notice that Satan was not bound in every way, but that he was not allowed to "deceive the nations" (v3,8), meaning he could not stem the flow of the gospel as it multiplied like leaven and the mustard seed.

Admittedly the sign of Satan's release will be invisible to human eyes. We will not see or know when it happens, if it hasn't already. But what we can know is its affect, because we are told. In Revelation 20:7-9 we read that immediately following his release, Satan once again begins to "deceive the nations," which signals the end of the Christian age and the spread of the gospel. The world will be plunged once again into spiritual darkness as it had been before Jesus, the "light of the world," came (Jn. 8:12). This time will fulfill the words of Jesus, "I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (Jn. 9:4).

Once spiritual blindness enters the world, Satan will gather an army symbolically called "Gog and Magog" (Rev. 20:8). Then we read, "They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (v9). The "camp of the saints" symbolizes all Christians tenting as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth [as] they seek a homeland" (Heb. 11:13,14), just like the Fathers. The collection of the saints is the "beloved city," which is the "city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven" (Heb. 12:22,23).

The most important sign of the end times is that upon his release, Satan will declare war against Christians! Let's now look at another sign Jesus gave us in his Olivet prophecy which would indicate the end of the age. Again, this is from a harmonized text,

"For then there will be **great tribulation** at that time, such as will not have occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created to that time, nor will ever occur *again*. And unless the Lord were to cut short those days, there would be no human survivors. But he will cut short those days for the sake of *his* chosen *people*, whom he has selected."

Jesus said the Great Tribulation would be the worst time of trial in the history of the world. When this unique time comes, it will be an unmistakable sign of the end of the age. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied about this time using similar language to that of Jesus, when he wrote, "Alas! For that day is **great**, so that **none is like it**; and it is the time of **Jacob's** trouble; but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). Why is it called "Jacob's trouble"? The Bible shows that Jacob's name was changed to Israel, hence his descendants became known as Israelites.

So the Tribulation is a time of trouble specifically for Israelites. Did you know the Bible talks about **two** Israels, as well as two types of Jews and two types of circumcision? The apostle Paul wrote about the two Israels, "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Rom. 9:6; *NIV*). The first Israel, those "descended from Israel," are the Jews. Paul continues, "That is, those who are the children of the flesh [Jews], these are **not** the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed [of Abraham]" (v8). The second Israel, the "children of the promise," are the true, spiritual descendents of Abraham, and thus the children of God through faith. These are "Israelite[s] **indeed**" like the disciple Nathanael (Jn. 1:47). These comprise the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), also called the "twelve tribes" (Acts 26:7; Jas. 1:1). It is this second Israel of whom the prophets spoke!

Of the two types of Jews and circumcision, Paul wrote,

"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Rom. 2:28,29).

Let's understand how these two Israel's came about. When God covenanted with the ancient nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai, it was a marriage covenant. God became Israel's husband and she became His wife. Almost immediately Israel began cheating on God by worshipping other gods. This lasted for centuries during which God sent His prophets as a type of marriage counselors, who passionately warned Israel concerning her infidelity. But she never remained faithful, and so the marriage ultimately ended in divorce.

Jesus told the Jews—Israel—of his day, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be **taken from you** and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Mtt. 21:43). That “nation” is the “Israel of God,” the restored Israel of which the prophets spoke.

The prophesied restoration of Israel as the New Israel is found in scores of passages throughout the prophets, and it is multi-faceted. The key to understanding these facets is to recognize that most are symbolic, presented as allegories and metaphors, intended to illustrate the major aspects of Christian salvation. The literalist will stumble in his understanding of these prophecies as have the Jews, Evangelicals, and so many other Christians.

Perhaps the most important theme in the Old Testament is the story of the exodus of Israel from Egypt, since it is mentioned so often. Thus one should not be surprised to find that by far the most often repeated prophecy about restored Israel is a “second” exodus from slavery (Isa. 11:11-12:6; Jer. 16:14,15; 23:3-8). The prophets foresaw people whom God would some day free from their slavery to **sin** through the blood of Jesus, and have their sins forgiven (Isa. 1:16-18; 43:25,26; 55:6,7).

This new Israel would enter into a “new covenant” with God (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 16:60-62), wherein He would clean the human heart with the water of His Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:24-35). These spiritual waters would flow into the barren desert of human lives and produce the abundant “fruit of the Spirit” (Isa. 32:15-17; 35:1-10; 41:17-20; 44:3,4; 51:3; 55:1). Paul wrote, “God has called us to peace” (I Cor. 7:15). And so restored Israel is described as a peaceful people (Isa. 2:1-5; 11:6-9; 65:25; Mic. 4:1-7). “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain...” God's holy mountain is Mt. Zion (Heb. 12:22-24), which is symbolic of the “church”—the collection of the saints.

Restored Israel is a spiritual flock led by the “Good Shepherd” (Isa. 40:9-11; Ezek. 34:23-31). She is protected by a metaphorical cloud by day and fire by night (Isa. 4:5,6), reminiscent of the first Israel. The Israel of God was prophesied to one day to be the wife of God “forever” (Hos. 2:19-23). God married and divorced ancient Israel for infidelity. At present, God in Christ is engaged to His future bride—the new Israel (II Cor. 11:2).

So many Christians today mistake the identity of restored Israel, just as the Jews have always missed Jesus. Many think the Jewish nation founded in 1948 fulfills the words of the prophets. But how could that be? Have the Jews been ransomed from spiritual slavery to sin and forgiven? Have they entered into a new covenant with God? Are they watered by the Holy Spirit? How could one of the most armed nations in the world be described as living peacefully? Are they shepherded by Christ? Of course not! That is why the Jews are not the Israel of God, nor the Israel described by the prophets.

There is so much confusion concerning end time prophecy because of the ideas put forth by eschatologists who base their beliefs on this error that says the Jewish state's existence is fulfilled prophecy. Let me state unequivocally, the Jews as a modern state have no significance in end time biblical prophecy. They have no special place with God at this time, and are simply His ex-wife. They

are just another spiritually uncircumcised Gentile nation in the world, whose capital, Jerusalem, God labels as “Sodom and Egypt” (Rev. 11:8).

Now we can conclude that the end time Great Tribulation, “Jacob’s [Israel’s] trouble,” will be a time of trial and testing for the New “Israel of God,” precipitated by the release of Satan when he sends an army to war against Christians. We have already seen the parallel between Jesus words in his Olivet Prophecy and the first four seals of Revelation. That parallel continues when we consider Jesus’ words about the Great tribulation, the time of end time Christian trial, and the fifth seal. And so we read,

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, oh Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth.’ And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellows servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed” (Rev. 6:9-11).

We have seen the many flaws in the Pre-Millennium teaching, and in the belief that the modern Jewish state is the Israel of end time prophecy. Let’s now consider the Rapture teaching, which states that prior to the Great Tribulation, all Christians worldwide will be saved from this time of trial and be raptured—transported—to heaven. The Great Tribulation is described in many biblical passages as a time of Satan’s wrath expressed as an end time war against Christians. What sense can there be in a belief that teaches that Satan’s war is only in his mind, since the object of his wrath—end time Christians—are whisked from his grasp to safety? In this, the Rapture teaching is dumbfounding in its contradiction of both logic and the scriptures.

What would make end time Christians more special than all people of faith who have lived before them? We are given an abbreviated chronicle of some of those people in Hebrews, where we read,

“...And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance...Still others had trial of mockings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with sword. They wandered about in sheepskins, and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb. 11:35-38).

Are end time Christians better than these saints? Should they be given special treatment when the Bible says, “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34)? If you have been told all your life that the Rapture teaching is certain truth, maybe it is time to research it for yourself. Perhaps with an open mind you will discover what I have. This teaching is of relatively recent origin, and it has no sound or reasonable biblical basis.

Earlier in this article we were introduced to “Gog and Magog,” who are a symbol of Satan’s **worldwide** army gathered against Christians in the end time (Rev. 20:7-9). The only other place in the Bible where Gog and Magog are mentioned in a similar context is Ezekiel 38,39. This passage is often popularly referred to as the “war of Gog and Magog,” and it has recently been made well-known by the writings of biblical eschatologists. Their teaching goes like this: as a sign of the end time, a coalition of nations, which will include Russia and Iran, will launch an armed attack upon the Jewish state of Israel. God in turn will supernaturally destroy this army by fire, as He does the one in Revelation.

It would be reasonable to conclude that Ezekiel's and Revelation's accounts are parallel, with the former going into much greater detail, so that the latter only need give the gist of the story. But the problem is that we have already seen that the object of Satan's wrath in Revelation's account is Christians, the **New Israel**, not the Jewish state. So how can Ezekiel's parallel account be talking about another Israel, namely the Jewish state? So many errors in biblical understanding can simply be accounted for by failing to take into account the context of a passage. The popular teaching of the "war of Gog and Magog" is a prime example of an erroneous belief resulting from taking a passage out of context. Let's now look at the context.

The book of Ezekiel was initially written to sixth century B.C. Jews who had been conquered and made captive by the Babylonians. It is a vision and message of hope showing that Israel would be restored. But it would be a new Israel, the "Israel of God"—the Christian nation—not the Jewish nation. It would be comprised of people ransomed from captivity to sin from all nations, not just Jews (36:24). Their hearts would be converted through the Holy Spirit (36:25-27). And so in context we read about this new Israel in greater detail in Ezekiel 37. We see people who were dead come back to life—a miracle! These are believers who have "passed from [spiritual] death into life" (Jn. 5:24; I Jn. 3:14). This is accomplished by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 37:14).

This new Israel is no divided monarchy like the Israel of old, but rather is united once again as the "twelve tribes" living at peace under Christ (37:16-26). The context continues in chapter 38 with an end time prophecy—"the latter years"—involving this restored Israel (v8). Notice how Israel is described as living in "unwalled villages...a peaceful people, who dwell safely" (v11). How can this be a description of the modern Jewish state which is armed to the teeth, having experienced war after war, and which has never known a moment's peace in its entire history? No, this is a description of Christians living as they always have: a peaceful people relying upon God's grace.

Revelation 12:17 describes an angry Satan who goes off to make plans in order "to make war with the remnant of her seed"—end time Christians. The context shows that the passage should continue without a chapter break, because we are next introduced to a "beast" empowered by Satan and "granted...to make war with the saints" (Rev. 13:1-7). This Beast is a symbol of Satan's final end time kingdom, which will be a worldwide state. The army of this police state is "Gog and Magog." (For more detail you may wish to read the article entitled "Understanding the Book of Revelation Part II: The Beast.")

We read, "...And he [Beast] was given authority to continue forty-two months" (Rev. 13:5), or 3½ years. Neither the number 42 nor a month is used in biblical prophetic numerology, thus we may consider this 3½ years as literal. This is a relatively short period of time for this final kingdom of Satan's to reign. But we read that Satan will only "be released for a **little** while" (Rev. 20:3). This is the time when "the Gentiles...tread the holy city [saints] under foot for forty-two months (Rev. 11:2). The prophet Daniel, writing about "the time of the end" (Dan. 12:9), prophesied, "...it shall be for a time, times, and half a time [3½ years]; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished" (v7).

This is also the same time in which the "two witnesses...will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days [3½ years]" in Jerusalem, after which they will be martyred by the Beast (Rev. 11:3-10). Satan's kingdom, brief as it will be, will bring about the longed-dreamed-of and so-called utopian "one world government." We are told, "And all who dwell on the earth will worship him [Beast]" (Rev. 13:8,4), except for Christians. Their resistance to the Beast will precipitate their genocide!

So in summary to this point, the first biblical signs of the end times to manifest will likely include an acceleration in religious deception, wars, famines, and diseases. There will also be an acceleration in religious, particularly Christian, persecution. This will culminate in the formation of a Satanic-led worldwide police state that will declare war against Christians.

Let's now examine another major biblical sign of the end times. In II Thessalonians 2 the apostle Paul wrote in detail about an end time false prophet,

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day [of Christ's return] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God....And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (v3,4,8-12).

This is a description of a man in the end time claiming to be a savior, “God” himself, but possessed by Satan, and empowered by him to perform real miracles. This will be such a powerful and persuasive cocktail, intoxicating the whole world—“strong delusion”—to the degree that they will submit to this man's every decree. He will be the human leader, though possessed of Satan, of the Beast, the worldwide state. Mankind will “believe the lie”: that happiness and fulfillment come from pride, self-reliance, wealth, fame, sensual pleasure, and rejection of God. Those who “receive the love of the truth” know this truth: happiness and fulfillment come from loving God and neighbor, living a life of humility and service.

Paul wrote that this man “sits...in the temple of God.” What is this temple? A lot of eschatologists have made a big deal out of this one statement, saying it means there will be a third Jewish temple built in Jerusalem, from where the Anti-Christ will dictate. This conclusion reflects a narrowed understanding. More careful Bible students know that a frequently used metaphor for the collection of the saints is as a “holy **temple** in the Lord” (Eph. 2:19-22; I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16). What Paul meant was that the man will don a Christian cloak in order to hide his true identity.

Let's compare Paul's description with the vision of the apostle John in which he saw a second beast:

“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon....He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the [first] beast...” (Rev. 13:11,13,14).

The key to the comparison lies in seeing that both the second beast and the “man of sin” possess the Satan-empowered ability to **perform miracles**, which will grant it/him great credibility and fame, and which will then be used to deceive the whole world. Further, these represent a real flesh and blood person called “the **false prophet** who works signs in his [Beast's] presence,” and who, along with the Beast will suffer utter destruction (Rev. 19:20).

Long ago God warned His people,

“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, (and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder of which he spoke to you comes to pass), saying, ‘Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is **testing you** to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut. 13:1-3).

Men have always been dazzled and deceived by real or imagined signs and miracles performed by their cultish leaders. They have failed the test over and over. But what about the saints? In his Olivet Prophecy, which includes signs of the end time, Jesus prophesied, “For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, **even the elect**” (Mtt. 24:24). Christians in the end time will be sorely tested by the miracles of the False Prophet. But Jesus went on to say, “See, I have told you beforehand” (Mtt. 24:25).

The description of the False Prophet contains a dichotomy: “he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon.” Rather than a wolf, he is a dragon/man in sheep’s clothing. Jesus is called the “Lamb” no less than 26 times in Revelation. The False Prophet will be a man who claims to be Christ, the Lamb, while being possessed by the dragon, Satan. There have always been servants of Satan who have posed as servants of God. The apostle Paul wrote,

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (II Cor. 11:13-15).

Ironically, this consummately evil man will arise out of Christianity—the “temple”! Though possessed of Satan, only God knows if he ever possessed the Spirit of God. We can read a surprising parallel in the book of Acts, in the story of a Samaritan named Simon, who was a forerunner of the False Prophet (Acts 8:9-24). He was a sorcerer who performed miracles which so awed the people that they considered him a “god.” When Philip came to the city and preached Christ, Simon ended up being baptized. The account says he “was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs being done” by Philip. When the apostles Peter and John came later, Simon offered them money so he could have the power to perform those miracles too. But Peter rebuked Simon sternly and sent him away.

When this man arises on the world stage introducing his syncretized church/state religion, and possessing supernatural powers, it should be a clear sign to all Christians that the end is near. The False Prophet will demand state worship upon penalty of death (Rev. 13:5; 14:9; 20:4). This will be an extreme trial for all Christians living at this time.

State worship has been around since the dawn of civilization. The tower of Babel was a kind of image of the state. Nebuchadnezzar’s “image” of either himself or some symbol of the empire was worshiped (Dan. 3:1-6). State worship existed in Roman times, and more recently in fascist Germany and Italy, and communist China and the Soviet Union. The ultimate end of all state worship—statolatry—is the control over all personal welfare and independent thought! This will be accomplished by the “mark of the beast.”

In conclusion, we must not be deceived by those who label any of the “beginning of birth pangs” as a particular sign of the end times. It will be clear enough to all real biblical students that the end is near when a charismatic miracle-working man arises and a worldwide state is formed which threatens the lives of Christians worldwide.