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#1345

## Unpacking The Future *Signs of the Times*

"Our earth is degenerate in these latter days. There are signs that the world is speedily coming to an end. Bribery and corruption are common. Children no longer obey their parents. They show disrespect for elders, gobble up their food at the table, and tyrannize their teachers." How many of you would say "amen" to that statement?

It actually comes from the writings of an Egyptian priest dated around 2000 BC.

In the 16th century AD the great reformer and Bible scholar Martin Luther wrote, "For my part, I am sure that the Day of Judgment is just around the corner...it is certain that time is now at an end."

Thomas Brightman who lived in the 1600s has been called "one of the fathers of Presbyterianism in England." This well educated and esteemed fellow predicted that "between 1650 and 1695 [we] would see the conversion of the many Jews and a revival of their nation in Palestine...the destruction of the Papacy...the marriage of the Lamb and his wife."

In 1970 Hal Lindsey wrote the best seller, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Here's what he said, "The most important sign in Matthew has to be the restoration of the Jews to the land in the rebirth of Israel.

Even the figure of speech 'fig tree' has been a historic symbol of national Israel. When the Jewish people, after nearly 2,000 years of exile, under relentless persecution, became a nation again on 14 May 1948 the 'fig tree' put forth its first leaves. Jesus said that this would indicate that He was 'at the door,' ready to return. Then He said, 'Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place' (Matthew 24:34, NASB).

What generation? Obviously, in context, the generation that would see the signs—chief among them the rebirth of Israel. A generation in the Bible is something like forty years. If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place. Many scholars who have studied Bible prophecy all their lives believe that this is so."

Obviously 1988 has come and gone and Jesus hasn't come back. Those are only a tiny sample of the thousands of "end of the world" predictions that have been made down

through the centuries.

Are there really signs that point to the end? Are all end time predictions just a bunch of wishful thinking? Does the Bible speak clearly about what it will be like when we're near the end?

Today we're in the final week of a series we're calling "Unpacking the Future." In these 5 messages we've tried to get a bird's eye view of the Biblical teaching on what the Bible calls "the last days."

We haven't made any predictions about when Jesus might come back. We haven't tried to tie Bible verses into every current event that has taken place in the last few years.

But what we have done is try to understand the clear teaching of the Bible about future prophecy.

First we established that the Bible is precise in its fulfillment of prophecy. We looked at the fact that God sets the standard at 100%. He said in Deuteronomy 18 that His prophets were never wrong.

From there we saw that the Bible contains hundreds of verifiable prophecies that have been fulfilled down to the slightest detail.

That means that when we look at prophecies dealing with future events we can have complete confidence that they'll be fulfilled just the way the Bible says.

We then used this diagram as our guide to point us to the order of events that the Bible says will take place in the future.

We're in the Church Age right now. That will end with the rapture, or the catching away of believers from this earth.

Next, the judgment seat of Christ will take place in heaven while the tribulation period takes place on earth.

At the end of 7 years Jesus Christ will return to defeat the anti-Christ and set up His kingdom where He'll rule from David's throne in Jerusalem.

The question we have isn't, how do we know these things will happen. We already have the evidence of fulfilled prophecy to back that up. The real question is when?

Is it possible to know anything about the timing of the last days? Are there signs that we should be looking for?

Rather than sensationalizing and taking verses out of context, I'd like us to look at three obvious signs. These are three signs that no other generation could look to for the past 2000 years.

*I. We Have The Sign Of Israel*

**turn to Genesis 17 page 14**

Somewhere around 2000 BC God chose a man named Abram out of the idolatrous culture of his day and made him a series of promises.

He repeats the promises in Genesis 12, 13, 15, and now 17.

**Read vs 1-9**

Abraham's descendants were the Jewish people. It's clear that God promised them the land of Israel. We call this the Abrahamic covenant.

**Turn to Jeremiah 31 page 698**

Along with the Abrahamic covenant God made three other covenants with Abraham's descendents. The Davidic in II Samuel promised an eternal kingdom.

The Palestinian in Deuteronomy 30 promised possession and blessing of the land.

And then the third we call the New covenant. **Read verses 31-34**

This one hasn't been fulfilled yet and won't be until the second coming of Christ.

*And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." Romans 11:26-27*

Beginning in about 63BC the Romans dominated and ruled Israel. Tensions really rose when Rome took over the appointment of the Jewish High Priest. In 39 AD, Emperor Caligula declared himself a god and ordered his statues to be set up in temples throughout the Empire. The Jews refused, and prepared for armed revolt.

The theft of a large amount of money from the Temple treasury by procurator Gessius

Florus contributed to the radicalization and increased the popularity of Zealots, who believed that any means were justified in order to attain political and religious independence from Rome.

In 66 AD Zealots in Jerusalem started a revolt to win back Israel's freedom from the Romans. In 70 AD a Roman general named Titus Flavius Vespasianus broke through and leveled and burned Jerusalem.

The city at that time had about 600,000 inhabitants. Titus invaded during Passover when Jerusalem was teeming with visitors, the city probably had 1.5 to 2 million inhabitants at the time of the siege.

The Jewish historian Josephus says that in the end 115,800 corpses were removed from the city, and 97,000 prisoners were taken. The total dead are estimated between 600,000 to over 1,000,000.

Three years later the last Jewish Zealots were conquered at the mountain stronghold of Massada and the Roman victory was complete.

For 1900 years there was no nation of Israel. Then in 1922 the League of Nations approved a British Mandate of Palestine with the object of creating a Jewish National Home. In 1947, the United Nations approved the partition of the British Mandate of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. On May 14, 1948, Israel declared independence.

No other people in the history of the world have been scattered and homeless and yet have come back together again as a nation.

The fact of the nation of Israel is the most powerful sign that we are in the last days. Their existence as a sovereign state is nothing short of a miracle from God.

From 70 AD on up until 1948 there was no way for these covenants of God with Israel to be fulfilled. Now there's a way. God's promises never fail.

So Israel is a sign. We can't set dates. We can't spell out a specific time table. But we can know that a major piece of the prophetic puzzle is finally on the table.

By the way, Hal Lindsey's statement that the generation that sees Israel back in the land will be the generation that sees the Second Coming was totally wrong.

What Jesus said was, *Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already*

*become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*

In other words read the signs. You can read the fig tree and know summer follows new leaves on the tree. So the Second Coming will follow the signs of Matthew 24 which include the anti-Christ desecrating the Jewish temple and the stars falling from the sky.

*I. We Have The Sign Of Israel*

*II. We Have The Sign Of The Middle East*

### **Turn to Daniel 2 page 780**

Daniel is a Jewish prophet living in Babylon in the 6th century BC. Daniel was a godly young man who was swept up in another invasion of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar's army had invaded and basically put Israel out of commission.

The walls were destroyed, David's temple was flattened, and the people were either killed, taken as slaves, or scattered in other surrounding countries.

Daniel and three friends are taken to Babylon and groomed in Nebuchadnezzar's palace.

One night the pagan king has a dream which really troubles him. He calls his wise men to interpret for him. They say, "No problem. You tell us the dream and we'll tell you what it means."

Nebuchadnezzar wasn't going to fall for that one. He said, "If you're so perceptive, then you tell me what I dreamed and what it means."

Since they couldn't do it the king ordered all his wise men killed. But when they came to get Daniel he said, "Hold everything. I'll tell the king his dream and what it means."

The king had dreamed of a statue. Here's the interpretation. **Read verse 37-43**

The statue represents four world empires. Kingdoms that have authority to rule the world. Daniel interprets the dream about these kingdoms.

The head of the image is made of gold. We're told right here that this represents Nebuchadnezzar.

The chest and arms of the image are made of silver. That kingdom is not named here, but it is in chapter 8. This is the Medio–Persian Empire which follows the Babylonian Empire.

The belly and thighs of the image are made of bronze. this part of the image is also named in chapter 8. This is Greece.

But, there's one more kingdom. A fourth kingdom. It has legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay. This one is not named.

The common interpretation of this image assigns the legs to the Roman empire and the feet to a revived Roman empire in the last days. In fact 99% of the commentaries you read take this view.

I have a great respect for biblical scholars who study passages and come to conclusions. I tread very lightly when the majority of them over time have come to the same conclusion. But this time I have to differ with the majority.

Remember, where is the city of Babylon located today? Iraq

Think about this. Babylon existed since the days of Nimrod in Genesis 10 but it wasn't until Nebuchadnezzar made Babylon the center of a world empire that it mattered prophetically.

The Medes and Persians had a long history but it wasn't until Cyrus made Babylon the center of his rule that the second kingdom of prophecy appeared.

The Grecian states had been developing for centuries before Alexander but prophecy takes no account of this.

It wasn't until Alexander made Babylon his world-center that the third kingdom of prophecy became present. Alexander died in Babylon.

With that in mind, what would you think would be the identifying mark of the fourth kingdom?

See, we're not interested in every kingdom that's significant *politically*. We're interested in every kingdom that's significant *prophetically*.

The prophetic significance revolves around Babylon. And as far as Rome goes not only was there never a time when Babylon was it's capital, Rome only briefly controlled

Babylon at the height of its power.

I believe without question that Rome has nothing to do with Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The fourth kingdom hasn't risen yet. The fourth kingdom will be centered in the middle east with its head in the rebuilt city of Babylon.

Now, obviously, Saddam Hussein wasn't the anti-Christ but isn't it interesting that Saddam Hussein committed himself to rebuilding Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. Why? Because Saddam Hussein saw himself as the successor to Nebuchadnezzar's greatness. He even minted coins with his image imposed over Nebuchadnezzar's.

God's prophetic center is not in Europe. It's in the Middle East. God has clearly defined future plans for Israel and for Babylon. Isaiah and Jeremiah spell out the complete and total destruction of Babylon. Revelation 17 and 18 put that destruction in the last days just before the return of Christ to set up His kingdom. That hasn't happened yet because the final kingdom hasn't been established.

But now notice, something happens to the image. **Read vs 44-45**

Verse 44 tells us this will happen in "the days of these kings." The toes of the image correspond to 10 rulers mentioned in Revelation 17 and Daniel 7. During this last kingdom there will be a confederation of 10 nations with a leader known as the Anti-Christ at its head.

The "times of the Gentiles" not only had a beginning, they have an end. A stone, cut without hands is going to crush the kingdom centered in Babylon. And God will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.

Who is the stone? Over 14 times in Scripture The Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as the stone. He is the rock that was smitten, pointing to His death on the cross. He's the "stumbling stone" and the "rock of offence" because His message of salvation by faith causes people to stumble over its simplicity. He's called "the chief cornerstone" because He's the foundation of the church.

Daniel pictures him as the smiting stone. He came to destroy the kingdoms of this world. Unlike other kingdoms, the earthly Kingdom that God establishes through Christ will never be destroyed, or fade away and be taken over by another people. On the contrary, it will consume every kingdom as well as the remnants of the past kingdoms.

Now, some people have actually taught that this is the church. This can't be the

church. The church didn't bring a dramatic end to anything. The stone of God's Kingdom came and smashed the image and it blew away like dust and the stone filled the earth. The church didn't cataclysmically destroy all the nations of the earth. The church didn't end the times of the Gentiles. There's one more kingdom to come.

The Kingdom of God in Daniel 2 cannot be the church, because the church has never overcome Gentile world power and it never will. The church didn't come and instantaneously fill the whole earth and take over. It grows quietly and inconspicuously, not violently with destruction.

Daniel is referring to a literal, physical, earthly Kingdom that God sets up as the times of the Gentiles ends.

In fact, it is a physical Kingdom that you can read all about in the Old Testament. It's referred to hundreds of times. The Old Testament says that Jerusalem will be rebuilt, Israel will be restored to the land, the curse will be lifted, there will be an abundance of food, there will be health and healing, there will be a high birth rate, the topography will change, a new Temple will be built, and so on. This is going to be a literal, physical Kingdom. It certainly will have a spiritual reality to it, but it will exist in the physical realm.

Listen, for centuries the Middle East was just a bunch of sand dunes and nomadic peoples. Something changed in our day and age. Because of oil the Middle East has come out of obscurity into prominence again.

Israel is a sign. The prominence of the Middle East is a sign. Not to make us set exact dates, but to recognize that the prophetic stage is being set for the final count down.

*I. We Have The Sign Of Israel*

*II. We Have The Sign Of The Middle East*

*III. We Have The Sign Of Amazing Technology*

### **Turn to Revelation 13 page 1096**

A few weeks ago we took a look at the 7 year time of tribulation that will come as soon as the rapture takes place. We saw that a world leader would come to power who would be energized by Satan himself.

The Bible calls this one the Beast or the anti-Christ. He'll seem to bring peace to our troubled world. He'll even get Israel to sign a peace treaty.

The world will honor the anti-Christ as a great leader. then, in the middle of the tribulation, the anti-Christ will break the peace treaty with Israel and demand that the world worship him as God.

II Thessalonians 2:9 says *The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders.*

He'll be able to do miracles and many of the people of the world will worship him.

**Read vs 11-12** This is like the anti-Christ's sidekick. We call this one "the False Prophet."

**Read 13-15** The anti-Christ is mortally wounded, probably an assassination attempt, but somehow appears alive. Since he's the anti-Christ he mimics the resurrection.

Next, this False Prophet gives what appears to be life to an image of the anti-Christ. No wonder people are deceived into following him. Not only that but if you don't worship the anti-Christ you're marked for death.

**Read 16-18**

What the anti-Christ wants is complete obedience. So to enforce it he uses some kind of mark that allows people to carry on normal transactions.

If you don't have the mark, you can't buy or sell.

Once again, not that many years ago, people laughed at the idea that there could be world wide control over people and economics, or that events could be seen around the world, almost in real time. Just like they laughed at the Bible's presentation of Israel in the last days.

The peace treaty for the war of 1812 was signed with Great Britain on Christmas Eve, 1814. Unfortunately their cell phone batteries must have been dead in New Orleans because they didn't get the call. The battle of New Orleans was fought January 8, 1815, two weeks after the war had officially ended.

Because news traveled so slowly in those days over 2100 lives were needlessly lost.

We'll today, we not only have a nation called Israel, where you have to be Jewish to gain citizenship, and they speak and read Hebrew but we also know how events can be seen around the world.

Miss Teen South Carolina can ramble on about why one-fifth of Americans can't find USA on a map and within days her video gets 3 million hits on YouTube!

A politician says something in one part of the world and within minutes sound bites are making their way around the globe.

We are obviously technologically set for complete authoritarian control if anyone could get the upper hand world-wide.

From GPS in your cell phone to EZ Pass in your car, to detailed online financial records, to credit and debit cards, we are getting set up for the anti-Christ to know who goes where, and to control who buys and sells.

Think about it, a decade ago we were getting there. Today we're there. And it's all because of technological advances that have entered into every facet of our lives.

Applied Digital Solutions Inc, has patented the VeriChip. This chip is a subdermal RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) device that can be used in a variety of security, financial, emergency identification and other applications. About the size of a grain of rice, each VeriChip product contains a unique verification number.

When this chip senses one of Verichip's proprietary scanners, it gets activated and transmits a unique ID number to the scanner. If the number matches an ID number in a database, the person with the chip under his or her skin can enter a secured room, complete a financial transaction, or get his medical records verified.

In the words of the scientists at the beginning of every episode of the 6 Million Dollar Man, "We have the technology..."

How close are we to the second coming of Jesus Christ and the end of the age? We're obviously a whole lot closer than at any other point in church history.

Today we have:

*I. We Have The Sign Of Israel*

*II. We Have The Sign Of The Middle East*

*III. We Have The Sign Of Amazing Technology*

things that no other generation has had converge as we've had.

Does that mean we can start setting dates? Does that mean that we should stop making plans for the future?

What we should be doing is the same thing that every generation has had to do. Be ready. Be prepared. Because when the end of all things comes crashing down on this world it's going to be too late.

Jesus just put it out really simply and straight forward. This is what He said: *Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*  
Matthew 25:13

The Bible says:

*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*

*Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I Thessalonians 5:4-9