

SIGNS OF THE END TIMES

"Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia." Charles Schultz

Through the years there has been much thought given to the end of the world. When you check the bible on the matter, you find that the world will most definitely come to an end. The question is not "if but "when." Are we approaching that time when the world will cease to be what it is today? Can we know?

As we saw last week, Matthew 24 deals with things that will take place during the last few years of the earth's history. In describing those things, the Lord said in

Matthew 24:32-35, "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. 34I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

If you look at a tree and see the leaves sprouting, you know that summer is not far away. It may not come for several weeks or even for a month or two, but once you see the leaves, you know summer is coming. In the same way, there will be slowly-unfolding signs of the end of the world and the return of Jesus Christ. Understanding those signs is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Every time we add another piece (sign), we see the picture becoming more and more clear of the kind of things that need to be on the stage for Jesus to return.

1. DANGEROUS TIMES

2 Timothy 3:1-4, "1But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—

When I read that passage, my first thought is that world has always been filled with wickedness. That being the case, this must be describing things that have gone from bad to worse. It's like walking by a garbage can that is filled with rotting fish in the heat of the summer. You are going to know those fish are there. It gets worse, however, when you take the top off the garbage can. Things have always been bad since the fall of man, but in the last days the top comes off the garbage can. That's when it really can get bad. The world has never been a more dangerous place to live than it is today. In years gone by, if a nation went to war with another nation, it was hand to hand combat and then it was guns. Today the weapons available can do damage that is almost unbelievable, and

there are many who want to use them. We've already experienced a 911, and reliable sources say another tactic come at any time.

Last year, Fox News aired a special called "Radical Islam." The documentary included clips from Islamic television showing political leaders openly advocating attacks on the United States and Israel. The documentary also included programs shown on Islamic TV in which young children sing of their desire to become suicide bombers. I think that is all just a part of what the world is headed for in the last days.

2. INCREASING KNOWLEDGE

Daniel 12:4, "But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

The New Living Translation puts it this way, "But you, Daniel, keep this prophecy a secret; seal up the book until the time of the end, when many will rush here and there, and knowledge will increase."

When those words were spoken to Daniel, he had no idea how quickly knowledge would advance in our time. Today, knowledge is being multiplied at a faster and faster rate and it ever has before. If you buy computer today, it may be outdated and six month. Today you can do everything from surfing the Internet to sending e-mail from your cell phone.

3. THE REBIRTH OF ISRAEL

As you study the prophecies concerning the end times, it is very obvious that the nation of Israel will play a key part. For over 2000 years that would have been a problem because when the Roman army destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., the Jews were scattered throughout the world. Then in 1948 an amazing thing happened. Israel officially became a nation. That is incredible when you take into account the fact that no nation has ever been able to maintain its national identity even 3 to 500 years after being removed from its homeland except Israel. Great civilizations like the Assyrians and the Babylonians have vanished. How many of you have talked with a Moabite recently? Do you have any neighbors who are Ammonites? Do you know the address of any Edomites? All those ancient peoples and have disappeared from history and from the face of the earth. But the Jews retained their national identity through almost 20 centuries and in 1948, they became a nation. Then in 1967, for the first time since the Babylonian captivity, they took charge of Jerusalem. Today, Israel is the focus of the world's attention. That becomes very significant when you understand the fact that Israel is only a small country of five million people.

There is really only one way that you can explain that-God. Thousands of years ago, God promised Abraham certain things in what is now called the Abrahamic covenant, and part of that covenant is the promise of the land.

Genesis 17:8, "The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

God said the Jews will possess the land. And now, God has taken a group of people who were scattered across the face of the earth and brought them together back in their land in order to fulfill prophecy the last days.

4. THE RUSSIAN/ARAB ALLIANCE

In Ezekiel 38, God speaks to nations who will at the end time and attack the nation of Israel.

Ezekiel 38:1-9, "Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you. "

'Get ready; be prepared, you and all the hordes gathered about you, and take command of them. After many days you will be called to arms. In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety. You and all your troops and the many nations with you will go up, advancing like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land.

The passage is clearly saying that in the end many nations will come against the nation of Israel. And many nations are mentioned. What are those nations?

The word, "Gog," is a word that refers to a leader. On the other hand, the word, "Magog," is a word that refers to an area that is identified by the ancient historian Josephus as the Scythians. Bible scholars identify this area of land as being made up of the nations that were formerly parts of the Soviet Union.

In the prophecies of Ezekiel, we're told three times that part of the force that invades Israel will come from the distant north or "the remotest parts of the north." The land that is the farthest north to Israel is Russia.

Persia is also in the list of those who will come against Israel, and it is easy to interpret because that nation retained the name it had since the ancient times until March 1935 when it became the nation of Iran.

Putting it all together, we see Russia with the nations that were formerly a part of the Soviet Union united together with the Arabs countries in an attack on Israel.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s, many thought the Russia's days of power will were over. But a couple of decades later, we find Russia seeking to reclaim the ground that was lost. In October 2007, Vladimir Putin made his first trip to Iran and then other Muslim nations. Russia is linking up with the Islamic nations, and what is the agenda of those nations? Among other things, they want to destroy Israel. In March of this year (2008) the Hezbollah leader said, "the presence of Israel is but temporary and cannot go on in the region. We will see you killed in the fields, we will kill you in the cities, we will fight you like you have never seen before."

All of that is not a pretty picture, but we know in the last days that terrible times will come, and we see this stage of being set now.

5. THE REUNIFICATION OF EUROPE

Daniel chapter two records a dream that the great king Nebuchadnezzar had that he could not understand. So he calls in his wise men and asks them to interpret it for him. When they cannot, in desperation he calls in a young man named Daniel, and during the night, God revealed the dream to him. When Daniel received the vision, he went in to the king to tell him what he had seen.

Daniel 2:26, The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"

27 Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:

29 "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of a giant statue made up of five sections. Its head was made of gold, its chest of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze and its legs of iron. The feet were made partly of iron and partly of clay.

Daniel 2:36-45 records the divine interpretation. The four parts of the statue represent four successive world empires: Gold representing Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar would not have doubted that the head of gold refer to his kingdom since the chief deity of Babylon was Marduk., The historian Herodotus describe the image of Marduk as a golden statue seated on a golden throne before a golden table and a golden altar. The historian Plini tells us that the robes of Marduk's priests were interlaced with gold.

The second world empire revealed in the king's dream is represented by the image's chest of silver. This is the Medo Persian empire that conquered Babylon in 539 BC and remained in power for approximately 200 years. The third world empire is represented by its belly and thighs of bronze, and it stands for the Grecian army led by Alexander the great. Alexander's soldiers armored themselves in bronze helmets and breastplates and carried bronze shields and swords. The fourth empire is symbolized by legs of iron and represents the nation of Rome that came into existence 50 years before Jesus was born. According to Daniel there is to be another division in the Roman Empire represented by the 10 toes of the statue.

Daniel 2:41-43 Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

This last kingdom is Daniel foretelling a time when the Roman Empire will consist of 10 kingdoms or leaders. As we look back through history we find nothing that corresponds to a tenfold Roman coalition. This is the final form of the Roman Empire on earth when God sets up his earthly kingdom (Daniel 2:44).

Since 1930, the nations of Europe have gradually come together creating a modern replica of the Roman Empire. In fact, the European Union is considered by many to be the second most powerful political force in our world.

Our understanding of this kingdom is expanded when Daniel has a vision in chapter 7. Daniel sees four beasts that each represents one of the kingdoms Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (7:23-24). He first sees a winged lion, representing Babylon. Then he sees a bear representing Medo-Persia. The third beast is a leopard, representing Greece, in the fourth is a beast that cannot be defined that represents the Roman Empire having 10 horns which again represent a coalition of 10 nations. But there is something more in the vision Daniel sees.

Chapter 7: 8 says, "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully."

Daniel 7:24, "The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

According to Daniel's prophecy, a supreme leader will rise from among the 10 leader confederacy in Europe. This leader will take control of the new European Union and become the final world dictator. We know him as the anti Christ.

At that time, people will be willing to follow almost anyone who can provide the answers they want. Paul-Henri Spaak, the first president of the U.N. general assembly once said, "we do not need another committee. We have too many already. What we want is a man of sufficient stature to hold the allegiance of all people, and to lift us out of the economic morass in which we are sinking. Send us such a man and be a God or devil, we will receive him."

What we're seeing is a puzzle that is being progressively put together. With every piece that is placed in the puzzle, we see more clearly the picture God has given us in his word of the end times.

APPLICATIONS

1. The only way to change the world is to change the hearts of people

People do evil in the last days because their hearts are evil. Their hearts are filled with anger, hatred and bitterness, and only Jesus Christ can change that. The answer to a safe, friendly society will never be accomplished by political means. It will only happen as the people of God decide to be the salt of the earth in reaching out with the good news of salvation to those who do not have it.

2. The only way to survive difficult times with a joyful heart is to walk with God

All of us have been through difficult times, and things may get worse in the future. The key to surviving difficult times is to make sure your heart remains focused on God, not the hardship. If you read the life of Daniel, you see him facing many hard places, but the position of his heart always remains the same. Whether young or old, he was always focused on God. Even though our bodies are on earth, our hearts are to be continually in heaven.

Nahum 1:7, "The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,"

No matter how bad things may get, no matter what may happen, one thing will not change-God will always be there for us to the very end. Knowing that is cause for joy.

3. Knowing the prophecies of the future weans us away from our trust in the kingdoms of this world

God gave Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel 2 different visions that meant the same thing. Why? It is believed by some that Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the impressive statute represents the way man views the kingdoms of this world-beautiful metals that can impress others. Daniel sees those same kingdoms from God's perspective. They are violent beasts that will not continue. The kingdoms of the world and the careers of the

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world come and go. They rise, and they fall. If you have a relationship with God, you have something that will never fall.

If you skip to the end of the book of Daniel, you find that the evil kingdoms of the earth have been destroyed, the anti Christ is defeated, Israel is delivered, Christians are raised from the dead, and God's kingdom is established. According to the end of the book, when it's all over, we win.