

25. Signs in Heaven and Earth

THE disciples asked Jesus, “What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Then the Master told them of the many signs-as the leaves of a fig tree-saying: “When his branch is yet tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh: so likewise you, when you shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.” Matthew 24:32, 33. This fig tree has in recent years opened leaf after leaf-sign after sign-more and more rapidly multiplying its sign leaves until today we have an overwhelming profusion of evidences that He is near and about to enter the door. He hangs the warning signs high in the sky. Spread over the earth in great areas, they are recorded as outstanding events in all histories; they are printed in great glowing headlines in the daily papers of every city; they are written in nature, in man himself, and in his activities; everywhere that eye can turn they are there.

So that men, students of world affairs, though they have little or no faith in these as fulfillment of divine prophecy, “fear. . . looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” Luke 21:26. “Edison, the renowned scientist and inventor, says that ‘life is becoming so intricate, so involved, so mixed up, that it is difficult to tell what will happen as the result of any act. Government, finance, and industry are daily becoming more mixed in a maze that human ingenuity seems incapable of untangling.’ L. P. Jacks, a well-known English minister, educator, and editor, declares: ‘I do not know how any man can look upon the world in which we are now living, without instantly coming to the conclusion that it stands in need of some masterful saving power. It is a rescue that is needed, rather than a mere reform. There has been a shipwreck, a catastrophe; things have got out of hand; and there is a state of horrible confusion.’” -A. L. Baker, in “Hope of the World,” page 12.

SELECTED REFERENCES

DA 627-636; GC 304-312,333,334; [7] Pages 19-36. [3] Pages 46-50; 57-65. [1] Pages 89-96, Dark Day. [1] Pages 329-336, Meteoric Shower; [6] Pages 113-129.

Memorize: Matthew 24:32, 33.

A. SUN, MOON, AND STARS.

Matthew 24:29; Joel 2:10, 30, 31; 3:15; Isaiah 13:10; Amos 5:8; 8:9.

1. The dark day, Friday, May 19, 1780.

The period of tribulation here refers to the 1260 years of papal supremacy, which we learned in former lessons terminated in 1798. The tribulation was shortened, for it ceased some years before 1798. Mark makes it clear (13:24), saying, “In those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light.”

“In some places persons could not see to read common print in the open air for several hours together. Birds sang their evening songs, disappeared, and became silent; fowls went to roost; cattle sought the barnyard; and candles were lighted in the houses. The obscuration began about ten o’clock in the morning, and continued until the middle of the next night.” -Noah Webster’s Dictionary, 1882 ed., Appendix, Explanatory and Pronouncing Vocabulary of Noted Names, “Dark Day.”

“The darkness of the following evening was probably as gross as ever has been observed since the Almighty fiat gave birth to light. It wanted only palpability to render it as extraordinary as that which overspread the land of Egypt in the days of Moses. . . . If every luminous body in the universe had been shrouded in impenetrable shades, or struck out of existence, the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper held within a few inches of the eyes was equally invisible with the blackest velvet.”-Letter of Dr. Samuel Tenney, dated Exeter, [N. H.,] December, 1785; quoted in “Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, For the Year 1792,” Vol. I, Part I, pages 97, 98.

“Though at nine o’clock that night the moon rose to the full, ‘it had not the least effect to dispel the deathlike shadows.’ After midnight the darkness disappeared, and the moon, when first visible, had the appearance of blood. . . . The description of this event, as given by eyewitnesses, is but an echo of the words of the Lord, recorded by the prophet Joel, twenty-five hundred years previous to their fulfillment.” -GC 308. (Joel wrote about 820 B. C.)

2. Falling stars, Wednesday, November 13, 1833. Revelation 6:12, 13.

“After collecting and collating the accounts given in all the periodicals of the country, and also in numerous letters addressed either to my scientific friends or to myself, the following appeared to be leading facts attending the phenomenon. The shower pervaded nearly the whole of North America, having appeared in nearly equal splendor from the British possessions on the north, to the West India Islands and Mexico on the south, and from sixty-one degrees of longitude east of the American coast, quite to the Pacific Ocean on the west. Throughout this immense region, the duration was nearly the same. The meteors began to attract attention by their unusual frequency and brilliancy, from nine to twelve o’clock in the evening; were most striking in their appearance from two to five. Arrived at their maximum, in many places, about four o’clock; and continued until rendered invisible by the light of day.” – Denise Homestead, in “The Mechanism of the Heavens,” page 328.

B. EARTHQUAKES.

Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:11, 25; Isaiah 51:6; Revelation 6:12.

A great earthquake opens the sixth seal before the sun and moon give their signs. Accordingly we have the Lisbon earthquake, Saturday, November 1, 1755.

“Among the earth movements which in historic times have affected the kingdom of Portugal, that of November 1, 1755, takes first rank; as it does also, in some respects, among all recorded earthquakes. The first shocks of this earthquake came without other warning than a deep sound of rumbling thunder, which appeared to proceed from beneath the ground, and it was immediately followed by a quaking which threw down almost the entire city. In six minutes sixty thousand persons perished.” - William Herbert Hobbs, in “Earthquakes,” pages 142, 143.

A letter from a ship captain who was an eyewitness tells, in part, the condition of the people. “Almost all the palaces and large churches were rent down, or part fallen, and scarce one house of this vast city is left habitable. Everybody that was not crushed to death ran out into the large places, and those near the river ran down to save themselves by boats, or any other floating convenience, running, crying, and calling.

The fear, the sorrow, the cries and lamentations of the poor inhabitants are inexpressible; every one begging pardon, and embracing each other, crying, Forgive me, friend, brother, sister! Oh! what will become of us! neither water nor land will protect us, and the third element, fire, seems now to threaten our total destruction! as in effect it happened. The conflagration lasted a whole week.”-Thomas Hunter, in “Historical Account of Earthquakes,” pages 72-74.

“The great earthquake of 1755 extended over a tract of at least 4,000,000 of square miles. . . . It pervaded the greater portions of . . . Europe, Africa, and America; but its extreme violence was exercised on the southwestern part of the former.” “In Africa, this earthquake was felt almost as severely as it had been in Europe. A great part of the city of Algiers was destroyed.” “Lisbon [Portugal] previous to that calamity . . . contained about . . . 150,000 inhabitants.... Mr. Barretti says ‘that 90,000 persons are supposed to have been lost on that fatal day.’”-Robert Sears, in “Wonders of the World,” pages 50, 58,381.

Nelson’s New Loose - Leaf Encyclopedia, article “Earthquakes,” remarks of this catastrophe, “The Lisbon Earthquake, which occurred on November 1, 1755, is the most notable earthquake of history.” - Volume IV, page 205. On the same page is a list of the great earthquakes of history, beginning with one in China in 1037, and ending with one in Rumania in 1940-sixty in all. By centuries, the list gives us: 11th century two, 12th century one, 13th century two, 16th century two, 17th century three, 18th century ten, 19th century nineteen, 1900-40 twenty one, with the last ten years listing nine. During the 700 years of this list before the Lisbon earthquake (1037-1755) there were 16 quakes; during the 185 since (1755-1940) there were 43 quakes. There have been more earthquakes in the last century than in the previous 800 years.

C. FAMINE AND PESTILENCE.

Matthew 24:7; Ezekiel 7:6, 15-17.

1. Famine.

Although the pages of history abound with stories of hunger-stricken peoples, yet the number of victims during recent times has never before been approached. In the great famine in China in 1919, no one knows the number of the dead, but that it ran into many hundreds of thousands is certain, and some say into millions. In three provinces alone there were at one time more than 13,000,000 who were destitute of food.

“And then there followed the great Russian famine, which the London Times described as ‘a spectacle that is apocalyptic in its awful suggestion of collapse.’ The archbishop of Canterbury declared

that ‘never in the history of the world has a condition of things existed comparable to the ghastly death by famine of whole millions of men, women, and children.’ . . .

“Besides these two monster famines, there have been the famines of Armenia and India, both of which would have loomed much larger had they not been dwarfed for the moment by those in China and Russia.”-A. L. Baker, in “The Hope of the World,” pages 54, 55.

2. Pestilence.

“In 1918 began the world-wide scourge of influenza, or ‘flu’ as it was more commonly called. Almost before notice had been taken of its presence, thousands fell its victims; and in the course of a few months, millions had succumbed. Deaths were so numerous in the Army camps of the United States that in some instances the usual custom of burial in separate graves was abandoned, and instead great trenches were dug with tractors, and the bodies buried en masse.. It is estimated that in India alone 12,000,000 people died of ‘flu;’ and some would place the number even higher. . . . Conservative students place the number of deaths in all the world due to influenza and its concomitant, pneumonia, at 15,000,000 to 20,000,000. . . .

“And so, although medical science has accomplished wonders in doing away with some of the pandemics of past times, such as typhus, yellow fever, and bubonic plague, yet right here in our vaunted germproof twentieth century, millions ‘in divers places’ were killed by pestilence, as the prophecy had foretold.” - Id., page 56.

“Flesh was never the best food; but its use is now doubly objectionable, since disease in animals is so rapidly increasing. Those who use flesh foods little know what they are eating often if they could see the animals when living, and know the quality of the meat they eat, they would turn from it with loathing. People are continually eating flesh that is filled with cancerous germs. Tuberculosis, cancer, and other fatal diseases are thus communicated.” - MH 313.

Insect pests are giving increasing concern to agriculturists; a recent example is that of the Mediterranean fruit fly’s invasion of Florida. The pest was considered so serious that the Federal Congress immediately appropriated millions of dollars to fight it. “Frank Thorne, in an article in the Orlando Evening Reporter-Star said: ‘War it is, to be sure, though not a war between nation and nation. It is the deadlier war between species and species; between world-bestrident man and one of the countless kinds of insects that are trying, blindly and unknowingly, but none the less desperately, to eat him literally off the planet.

“Tick and warble fly threaten his meat, chinch bug and corn borer threaten his bread, and now comes this latest addition to the long list we already have to fight in America, to snatch the ripe fruit away from his hand.”

“Pestilences foretell the climax of the ages, and that the day of God is at hand.”-The Watchman Magazine, September, 1929, pages 12, 13.

KEY TEXTS

Joel 2:30,31
Matthew 24

Matthew 24:29
Mark 13

Matthew 24:7 Revelation 6:12, 13
Luke 21

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. How many distinct prophecies can you count in Matthew 24?
2. Describe the dark day; the falling stars.
3. What have the heavenly bodies had to do with the telling of time?
4. How do the present-day signs differ from those of the last century?
5. What are the latest signs found in the daily press? (Bring to class up-to-date clippings and news items from any source which apply directly to the fulfillment of some sign.)

TEST QUESTIONS

Answer With Ample Bible Proof

1. What texts tell of signs hung in the heavens?
2. What texts tell of signs in the world of natural science?
3. Give the texts and dates of the three chief signs in heaven and earth so far fulfilled.
4. How have the date and place of these three great signs synchronized with man’s knowledge of their prophetic significance?
5. What signs in heaven and earth are now in process of fulfillment? Which are yet to be fulfilled?