

God Speaks To Modern Man

The answer to that heart-searching question is ever the same. We may wear the crown of everlasting life then if we surrender in simple faith to the Christ of the cross now. This surrender includes the taking up of our cross and following Him daily in loving service and in advancing light.

To the rich young man Jesus said, "Go sell, and give, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me!" But the young man was sad at the saying. His answer was No. A religious leader said to Jesus, "I will follow You anywhere." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." When the man heard that he changed his mind. Another disciple said, I will follow Thee, but I must stay with my father until he dies. After that I will go." Said Jesus, "Let the dead bury their dead." He knew that the man was only making an excuse for not taking up his cross.

When Christ called Peter and Andrew from their fishing, "they straightway left their nets, and followed him." Matthew 4:20. When He called James and John from their fishing smack, "they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him." Verse 22. Seeing Matthew sitting at the tax-collection booth, He said to him, "Follow me. And he arose, and followed him." Matthew 9:9.

When Peter "said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed you; what shall we have therefore?" Jesus replied that they would have everlasting life, and sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:27-29). "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." 2 Timothy 2:12.

"I will follow Thee, my Savior,
Thou did shed Thy blood for me;
And though all men should forsake Thee,
By Thy grace I'll follow you."
J. LAWSON

24. Christ's Ten Signs of His Second Coming

"THIS is the thing that puzzles me," said one man: "Christ foretold His second advent and counseled His followers to be ready. His disciples preached of His return. Today thousands of voices unite in giving the message. Yet nearly two thousand years have passed, and He is not here. Might not two thousand more years go by and He not come? Even ten thousand years? What can we actually know about the matter, if anything?"

This is a fair question. For an answer we turn to the testimony of Christ, who declared, I will come again." John 14:1 What did He say regarding the signs of His return?

A few days before Calvary, Jesus made a dire pronouncement. To the Jews He said "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" Matthew 23:38. Immediately following are these significant words: "And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See you not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Matthew 24:1-3.

Let us bear in mind the picture. Jesus here forecast the utter desolation of Jerusalem, deserted by God and destroyed by man. The stunned disciples could not conceive of such a thing except in connection with Christ's glorious kingdom and the end of the world, or age, as it really means.

In answer to His disciples' questions, the Lord drew aside the curtain and revealed to them the major events that would precede His final return to earth.

Jesus therefore proceeded to give to His disciples ten great signs. Some of these signs relate to the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place forty years later in AD 70. Some of the signs refer to His Second Coming. Some are applicable to both-most of them, in fact. We shall here consider ten specific signs that were to be seen in the period of the last days, just before the Second Coming of our blessed Lord. Not one or two signs, but ten of them-signs given, not by Peter and Paul, or James and John, but by Jesus Himself, the Son of God.

1. FALSE CHRISTS AND FALSE PROPHETS

Immediately after the question of His disciples, "What shall be the sign of thy coming?" we read this statement: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Matthew 24:4, 5.

Some years ago there was a man in southern California who claimed to be the Messiah. As many as twenty thousand people were said to gather at his night sessions on low foothills, and many remained to the break of day. Miraculous healing of the crippled, ill, deaf, dumb, and blind were reported. This type of deception Jesus foretold. Said He again, "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Verse 24. There will undoubtedly be the most spectacular manifestations in this direction, and not always by some apparently fanatical person.

Literally millions are today being blown about by every wind of doctrine, because they innocently trust in miracles and wonder working as signs of truth. Christ made it clear that this cannot safely be done. Said He, "Behold, I have told you before." Verse 25. In Revelation, Christ predicts that a power "makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do." Revelation 13:13, 14.

You may be invited to go to the desert to see a messiah. "Go not forth," said Christ (Matthew 24:26). Someone may say to you, "Christ appeared to a group of people in a darkened, secret chamber, and His form glowed with celestial light." Said Christ, "Believe it not." Matthew 24:26.

It is vital to remember that deception concerning the truth and nature of His coming will be widespread among the very people interested in that event. Let not your faith in the Second Coming of Christ and your desire for sanctification lead you to allow miracle working to determine what you believe or do. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." John 17:17. Does God never work a miracle? Yes. But we here emphasize and reemphasize that miracles, or apparent miracles, are not to determine our faith and actions. Widespread interest in "great signs and wonders," performed through men, resulting in millions being deceived thereby-this is the first sign that Jesus gave of His second coming. You may witness it on every hand as more and more persons become interested in Christ's return.

2. WORLD WARS

"How could war be a dependable sign of the coming of Christ?" asks one. Have there not been "wars and rumors of wars" for all recorded time? The answer to the last question must be Yes. It has been said that war has been on the average thirteen times as prevalent as peace. Men have figured out the number of warless years, and they have been comparatively few. Therefore, mere war and talk about war cannot, alone, be a sign of Christ's immediate return.

We turn to His own words: "you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Matthew 24:6. Jesus Himself was saying, "Wars and rumors of wars will mark the period preceding My return, but these are but a prelude to something vastly greater." Then He proceeds, "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." Verse 7.

How clear is the picture! Wars and rumors of wars had always been part of a sinful world. But the real and new war sign was to be world war! War on an international scale, global war, war so completely dwarfing everything preceding it that it would stand apart from all recorded warfare. It would constitute a sign of His coming.

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, nephew of the emperor of Austria and heir to the throne, was, with his wife, assassinated in the streets of Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia. The fuse to World War I was lighted that day. The slaying was performed by men who were members of the Serbian race. So, one month later, Austria declared war on Serbia, and World War I soon enveloped earth's major nations.

It has been estimated that before the terrible catastrophe was over, seven eighths of the world was at war. Nearly 60 million men were under arms. More than 10 million soldiers were killed, as many civilians were dead, and millions of war widows, orphans, and refugees were left as an aftermath. The financial cost has been reckoned at from 200 to 400 billion dollars, depending on what items were included. The whole thing was so different, so gigantic, so staggering, that great men could only throw up their hands and say, "The curtain has been rung down upon a world never to be seen again, and has gone up on a new age."

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A brief twenty years slipped by just long enough for a completely new crop of soldiers to come upon the stage of action, men who remembered nothing of war. Then with blitzkrieg suddenness came the sickening shock of World War II. The Bank of International Settlements of Basel, Switzerland, gives the cost of this conflict as 1,352 billion dollars. This is about four times the cost of World War I, as given by the same source. In fact, it has been said that it cost 75 cents to kill one soldier in Caesar's time, and \$50,000 to kill one soldier in World War II. Taking the general estimate of 20 million men killed in World War II, and the total cost as above presented, you may easily figure the cost at \$67,600 per man killed. It was at this fabulous cost in money, and the yet greater cost in suffering and loss, that the world sacrificed 20 million of its young men in that wild orgy of blood, fire, and explosives. The earth and sea and sky never before witnessed such widespread and violent destruction by war. "It shall be a sign." That is what Christ said.

In 1938, just before World War II, the World Almanac and Book of Facts, on page 710, gave this statement: "After an analysis of 902 wars and 1,615 internal disturbances in 2,500 years, Professor Pitirim A. Sorokin, chairman of the Department of Sociology at Harvard, reports that the war index for the twentieth century reached a total eight times greater than all the preceding centuries." And we remember that this did not include World War II and those following it.

The year 1945 marked not only the end of World War II but the discovery, manufacture, and use of the atom bomb. It was first dropped for destructive purposes on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. According to one writer, "In a city of two hundred and forty-five thousand, nearly a hundred thousand people had been killed or doomed at one blow; a hundred thousand more were hurt." - JOHN HERSEY, "Hiroshima," *The New Yorker*, August 31, 1946, p. 22. On the second anniversary of that terrible day a message from General Douglas MacArthur was read to the remnant of Hiroshima. "He warned 'all men of all races that the harnessing of nature's forces in furtherance of war's destructiveness will progress until the means are at hand to exterminate the human race.'" - *Time*, August 18, 1947. Courtesy of *Time*, copyright *Time, Inc.*, 1947.

The later development of the hydrogen bomb, the self-guided and ground-guided missiles, atomic submarines and their missiles launched from under water, the man-made satellites, et cetera, forecast war potential of ever-increasing horror.

According to the Smythe report, 1945 was the year when civilization "acquired the means to commit suicide at will." In other words, not only was World War II a world war, but it unleashed forces that could bring world destruction. This has caused a universal cry among the leaders of the world, "We must have one world or no world!"

We thus clearly see that Jesus foresaw the last-day development of world wars. He stated in the simplest language that these conflicts would be a sign of His Second Coming. Where dwells a man today who has not read about, heard of, or seen this sign?

3. WIDESPREAD FAMINE

Said Christ, "There shall be famines." Matthew 24:7. Again, this sign would have to involve famines on an unusual scale to constitute a clear indication of Christ's return.

After World War I, China's great famine numbered in its grip 15 million starving and 3 million dead. Russia's famine, according to the noted explorer Nansen, was the "most appalling in the recorded history of man." The unspeakable tragedies of that dreadful disaster will probably never be fully told till the judgment day. Until then we have but the spotty reports of noted correspondents.

China's famine of 1936 in the Szechwan Province was the result of years of feeding armies and robbing harvests. Dispatches reported that "15,000,000 peasants-a number equal to the entire population of New York State, Connecticut, and Vermont-have crawled into their mud-huts to perish of hunger. Others, driven by despair, are selling their wives for thirty cents' worth of rice, their young daughters for a dollar." - *The Literary Digest*, May 9, 1936, p. 16.

In connection with and following World War II widespread famine conditions prevailed. Reliable authorities estimated that the grizzly specter of starvation haunted 140 million in Europe, and 500 million in the world. In 1943 Hallett Abend estimated that of the 604 million in Germany and German-occupied countries, 10 per cent were "already doomed to die of starvation or of diseases resulting from malnutrition." - "Millions Must Starve," *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 23, 1943, p. 22. On October 31, 1943, in an editorial the *New York Times* reported that in the province of Bengal, India, people were dying of

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starvation, cholera, and dysentery at the rate of almost 100,000 a week.

The world food problem has not been solved. In *Time*, May 31, 1948, are these ominous words: "It is not the atomic bomb, but the food crisis that may destroy us.' . . . In the race between population and food supply . . . population is winning. . . . Harvests that would have seemed bountiful ten years ago are inadequate now." (Courtesy of *Time*, copyright *Time, Inc.*, 1948) These are statements of Sir John Boyd Orr, who was at the time director general of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization.

The simple facts seem to be that there are about 4 billion acres of tillable land in the world. For one man to feed and care for himself properly, it requires on an average two and a half acres. But with 2,250 million people there are actually less than two acres per person. Two thirds of the world is always undernourished, says Mr. Orr.

But this is not all. The land is getting poorer and poorer. Then population is becoming greater and greater, despite war, famine, disease, accident, suicide, murder, and old age. It is increasing at the rate of 20 million every year. In less than one hundred years it is estimated that the population will be doubled. Can the food supply be doubled? Already in many places men are pumping out more water from the earth than nature is putting back in. There is soil-building and erosion control, but this provides no foreseeable answer. One writer speaks of "universal hunger." Jesus Christ predicted worldwide war and world food shortage as signs of His coming.

4. PESTILENCES

"There shall be famines, and pestilence." Matthew 24:7.

In 1918, the year that marked the end of World War I, the influenza epidemic struck, taking a toll of an estimated 18 million lives. In addition to disease epidemics, we face two other grim possibilities of pestilence. One is deliberate man-made famine. This may be done by certain governments denying seed to certain farmers in order to force them into line. Or it may be brought about by the spread of plant-destroying germs, insects, and chemicals. Where there is hunger pestilence follows. The other horrifying outlook possibly is directly and intentionally produced pestilence and disease.

"The most terrible of all poisons known to man, the toxin of the botulinus bacillus, now can be produced in quantity by the U.S. Chemical Warfare Service. The substance has long been known to scientists, but this is the first time it has been sufficiently purified to become a dread weapon of war. Botulinus toxin is a thousand times more deadly than mustard gas; so that an ounce could kill, swiftly and quietly, every single person in the United States and Canada. . . .

"Spread through the air in tiny and invisible droplets by planes or by the poisoning of the water supply of an entire city, the toxin can be used to decimate entire populations. . . .

"Biological warfare . . . might conceivably include attacking enemy troops or peoples with virus diseases, as for example, influenza, infantile paralysis, smallpox, and sleeping sickness; with such bacteria as cholera, anthrax, dysentery, leprosy and typhoid. With rickettsia-like typhus, Rocky Mountain spotted fever; or with body-infiltrating fungi and tissue-eating yeast." - JACK SCHUYLER in *America*, February 21, 1948.

To His disciples Christ put it in one word, "pestilence." That the world, despite medical science, is yet to pass through unbelievably horrifying experiences with pestilence seems a definite certainty. "Signs of My return," said Jesus.

5. EARTHQUAKES

"There shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes, in divers places." Matthew 24:7.

Near the end of 1946 an earthquake devastated a part of Japan. It is reported that Dr. Hagiwara, leading seismologist, estimated the force of this earthquake as equal to one hundred thousand atom bombs.

In 1945, B-29 bombers swarmed over the city of Fukui, Japan, and its thousands of shanty buildings were destroyed by blast and fire. Three years later the city was 60 per cent rebuilt of substantial structures for permanency. Then came the 1948 earthquake.

Carl Myclans, *Time* correspondent, wrote: "There wasn't any warning-the floor just pushed up under us, and great chunks of wall and ceiling began to crash about us. . . . We flung ourselves on the compound lawn, but the earth shook so violently that some of us were jerked upright and bounced about like popcorn.... Ripping, crackling and crushing sounds. . . . Yellow dust rose over the city, and suddenly a

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strong, crazy wind blew up, first from one direction, then another. After a moment's silence came the small voices of human beings-shouts and cries which rose into a din throughout the city. . . . A thin gray wisp of smoke crawled up behind the sagging department store. It grew larger. The fire had begun. . . . The people of Fulcui say that tonight's quake was worse than the B-29's." - Time, July 12, 1948. Courtesy of Time, copyright Time, Inc., 1948.

After World War I, China was rocked by a quake in 1920 that took a toll of 200,000 lives. Three years later in 1923 came the terrible quake in Japan. In that awful catastrophe 150,000 human beings perished. In ten years the world saw its greatest war to that time, its two greatest famines, and two of its most devastating earthquakes.

Up to date we know of no plans for man-made earthquakes to destroy nations, but we are sure that if such a thing could be worked out, this too would be added to the list of possibilities. We do know that earthquakes have increased, as shown by the following report from the British Association for the Advancement of Science:

Destructive Earthquakes	
First Century AD	15
Sixteenth Century A.D	253
Eighteenth Century A.D	640
Nineteenth Century AD	2,119

Said the Savior, "There shall be . . . earthquakes in divers places"; that is, in many places. He predicted an increase in earthquakes as a sign of His coming.

6. PERSECUTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

World wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes in divers places – "All these things are the beginning of sorrows," said Christ (Matthew 24:8). Reading on, we find these words: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and you shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." Verse 9.

Not only here but in other scriptures is it made plain that freedom will be denied the people of God in the closing days of the world's history. Christians should not court persecution. One may be persecuted and not be a true Christian. Persecution, standing alone, is not a sign that the persecuted is a child of God. But Jesus did predict affliction for His people in the day just before His return. Much more could here be said on this matter, but it will be touched upon in later chapters.

7. ABOUNDING WICKEDNESS, DECLINING LOVE

"Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Verses 10-12. The Revised Standard Version reads, "Because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold." Verse 12.

The Son of God thus bears witness that abounding, multiplied wickedness would so overflow the world that most men would be swept along with it. Social pressure is a tremendous thing. Children incline to do what other children do. Young people lean to the thinking and acting of other youth. Everyone does thus and so because everyone else does thus and so. Jesus pleaded for His followers, "I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil." John 17:15.

He knew what would come in the last days. While still answering His disciples' question about signs of His coming, He said, "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark.... so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Matthew 24:37-39. Concerning those dark days before the Flood, we read, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5.

There are three ugly tragedies in these portrayals of the Book of God, and one gleaming hope. The first tragedy is that wickedness is multiplied and iniquity abounds. So much so that the wisest statesmen of our time are concerned for the very existence of civilization.

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The second and sadder tragedy is that most professed followers of Christ are experiencing a waning and dying love for Him. Swept along by the current of evil, they become less and less like Christ and more and more like the world. They seek the same pleasures, bet on the same horses, gamble with the same cards, call for the same liquor, buy the same cigarettes, watch or listen to the same prize fights, attend the same movies, read the same comics, follow the same murder mysteries, fawn over the same actors and actresses, pick up the same profanity, dance to the same music, and divorce in the same courts. Prayer gives place to pining for the world, and the Bible gives place to the daily newspaper and fiction.

The third tragedy is that Christians who first betray themselves and their Christ will one day betray His followers. "Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." Matthew 24:10.

What is the gleam of hope painted into this modern scene more than nineteen hundred years ago? "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Verse 13. There are those who in this time of mounting evil will endure unto the end. With a faith founded upon Christ and fed by the Word of God, they "hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end," refusing to cast it away, for it "bath great recompence of reward." Hebrews 3:14; 10:35. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" is the urgent question of the Christ who gave us the signs of His coming.

A few years ago an accomplished man of letters committed suicide. He left a note telling why. He was not ill. He had not failed. He was not a disgrace. He had friends, home, and fortune.

Prisoners at Leavenworth Penitentiary stream through the prison yard. Our overcrowded prisons today are a sorry reflection on our modern "progressive" civilization.

But he said, "My spiritual home has destroyed itself. After one's sixtieth year unusual powers are needed to make a wholly new beginning. Those that I possess have been exhausted by years of wandering."

8. SUN, MOON, AND STARS

As Christ continued giving the signs of His coming He said in Luke 21:25, "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars."

In Matthew 24:29 the timing of such signs is more definitely given: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light."

When was the great tribulation here spoken of? There was one great period of tribulation in connection with the siege and fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Then there followed the satanic persecution of the early Christians by pagan Rome. But neither of these could be the one here referred to, for the simple reason that they took place not less than fifteen hundred years ago. They could not be signs of the Second Coming of Christ.

The other great tribulation came especially under the later centuries of what is sometimes called the Dark Ages, as far as the church is concerned. For 1260 years, or from AD 538 to AD 1798, the professed Christian church rode high in world affairs.

In connection with the rise of the Protestant Reformation, and in order to halt its progress, the great ecclesiastical system of that day set up the Inquisition. This was a church court to try those charged with heresy. It was not until 1542 that this court became more or less the supreme tribunal for the whole church. This was just four years before the death of Martin Luther. Persecution, which in preceding centuries had been more or less spotted, now spread all over Europe. Millions perished because they dared to believe contrary to the doctrines of the church in power.

Jesus said, "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Verse 22. God has set the time for this persecuting power as 1260 years (which ended in 1798, as we shall see), and Jesus' prophecy indicated that persecution would be cut off in the latter time of this period. Note His prophecy in Mark 13:24: "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened." Thus persecution was to cease before the year AD 1798. The time of the ending of the persecution and the date 1798, the sun was to be darkened, and the moon was to withhold its light.

An unexplainable phenomenon occurred on May 19, 1780, known in history as the Dark Day, when shortly before noon on a bright morning the sun became dark.

When did the persecution cease? One is fully safe in saying not later than AD 1776. The Protestant Reformation could not be stopped. The persecution by the Jesuits had been suppressed. Freedom was avowed in the United States. The day of liberty was dawning for the world.

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Was there a darkening of the sun in this short period? The answer is Yes, on May 19, 1780, or eighteen years before the ending of the 1260-year period in 1798, and shortly after persecution had practically ceased. What records do we have of this event? They are numerous, and space will permit but a brief picture.

From an eyewitness in Massachusetts comes this description: "In the morning the sun rose clear, but was soon overcast. The clouds became lowery, and from them, black and ominous, as soon as they appeared, lightning flashed, thunder rolled, and a little rain fell. Toward nine o'clock, the clouds became thinner, and assumed a brassy or coppery appearance, and earth, rocks, trees, buildings, water, and persons were changed by this strange, unearthly light. A few minutes later, a heavy black cloud spread over the entire sky, except a narrow rim at the horizon, and it was dark as it usually is at nine o'clock on a summer evening.

"Fear, anxiety, and awe gradually filled the minds of the people. Women stood at the door, looking out upon the dark landscape; men returned from their labor in the fields; the carpenter left his tools, the blacksmith his forge, the tradesman his counter. Schools were dismissed, and tremblingly the children fled homeward. Travelers put up at the nearest farmhouse. 'What is coming?' queried every lip and heart. It seemed as if a hurricane was about to dash across the land, or as if it was the day of the consummation of all things.

"Candles were used; and hearth-fires shone as brightly as on a moonless evening in autumn. . . . Fowls retired to their roosts and went to sleep, cattle gathered at the pasture-bars and lowed, frogs peeped, birds sang their evening songs, and bats flew about. But the human knew that night had not come." - *The Essex Antiquarian*, vol. 3, no. 4 (April, 1899), pp. 53, 54.

What of the night following this unusual day? I quote, "Nor was the darkness of the night less uncommon and terrifying than that of the day; notwithstanding there was almost a full moon, no object was discernible but by the help of some artificial light, which, when seen from the neighboring houses and other places at a distance, appeared through a kind of Egyptian darkness which seemed almost impervious to the rays." - *Thomas' Massachusetts Spy*, vol. 10, no. 472 (May 25, 1780).

Another eyewitness wrote, "I could not help conceiving at the time, that 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, New Hampshire, December, 1785; cited in *Collections of Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 1, 1792.

This is another picture: "The darkness somewhat increased all day, and before time of sunset, was so intense that no object whatever could be distinguished. Anxiously and tremblingly, people waited for the full moon to rise at nine o'clock, and even little children with strained eyes, sat silently watching for its beautiful beams to appear. But they were disappointed, the darkness being unaffected by the moon." REV. W. R. COCHRANE, *History of the Town of Antrim, New Hampshire*, pp. 58, 59.

Thus the sun was darkened and the moon did not give her light. And history records the day as "The Dark Day." Noah Webster's dictionary, edition 1869, gives this: "The Dark Day, May 19, 1780-so called on account of a remarkable darkness on that day extending over all New England.... The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not known."

Another writer says, significantly, "The causes of these phenomena are unknown. They certainly were not the result of eclipses."-*The Guide to Knowledge, or Repertory of Facts*, edited by Robert Sears, p. 428.

Was this darkness natural or supernatural? I do not here attempt to decide that matter. The sign came at the right time, and whether natural or supernatural, or a combination of both, it seems the definite fulfillment of the Savior's prophecy.

I submit this thought from Dr. Samuel Stearns: "The primary cause must be imputed to Him that walks through the circuit of heaven, Who stretches out the heaven like a curtain, who makes the clouds His chariot, who walks upon the wings of the wind. It was He, at whose voice the stormy winds are obedient, that commanded these exhalations to be collected and condensed together, that with them He might darken both the day and the night. Which darkness was, perhaps, not only a token of His indignation against the crying iniquities and abominations of the people, but an omen of some future destruction."-Letter in *Independent Chronicle*, Boston, June 22, 1780.

The next sign was the falling of the stars, or the great meteoric shower of November 13, 1833. "And the stars shall fall from heaven," said Christ (Matthew 24:29). This naturally does not refer to the

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falling of the great suns of the sky, or of the planets, but of the meteors which strike our atmosphere and burn as they fall-falling stars, or shooting stars, we call them. This grand display was seen over all the United States, a part of Mexico, and the West Indies.

A writer on astronomy gives this description: "On the night of November 12-13, 1833, a tempest of falling stars broke over the earth. North America bore the brunt of its pelting. From the Gulf of Mexico to Halifax, until daylight with some difficulty put an end to the display, the sky was scored in every direction with shining tracks and illuminated with majestic fireballs."-AGNES M. CLERKE, *History of Astronomy in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 328.

A Yale professor gives us this picture: "The morning of November 13th, 1833, was rendered memorable by an exhibition of the phenomenon called shooting stars, which was probably more extensive and magnificent than any similar one hitherto recorded.... Probably no celestial phenomenon has ever occurred in this country, since its first settlement, which was viewed with so much admiration and delight by one class of spectators, or with so much astonishment and fear by another class. For some time after the occurrence the 'meteoric phenomenon' was the principal topic of conversation in every circle."-DENISON OLMSTED, in *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, vol. 25 (1834), pp. 363, 364.

An observer in Missouri wrote: "Though there was no moon, when we first beheld them, their brilliancy was so great that we could, at times, read common-sized print without much difficulty, and the light which they afforded was much whiter than that of the moon, in the clearest and coldest night, when the ground is covered with snow.... There was a grand, peculiar, and indescribable gloom on all around, an awe-inspiring sublimity on all above: while the sanguine flood Rolled broad slaughter o'er the plains of heaven, And Nature's self did seem to totter on the brink of time!"

"There was scarcely a space in the firmament which was not filled at every instant with these falling stars, nor on it, could you in general perceive any particular difference in appearance; still at times they would shower down in groups---calling to mind the fig tree casting her untimely figs when shaken by a mighty wind." Letter from Bowling Green, Missouri, to Professor Silliman, in *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, vol. 25 (1834), p. 382.

The writer just quoted, in referring to the fig tree, was thinking of this prophecy in Revelation 6:13: "The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree castes her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind."

One eyewitness, with this in mind, says:

"The stars fell 'even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.' Here is the exactness of the prophet. The falling stars did not come as if from several trees shaken, but from one. Those which appeared in the east fell toward the east; those which appeared in the north fell toward the north; those which appeared in the west fell toward the west; and those which appeared in the south (for I went out of my residence into the park) fell toward the south; and they fell, not as the ripe fruit falls; far from it; but they flew, they were cast, like the unripe fig, which at first refuses to leave the branch; and when it does break its hold, flies swiftly, straight off, descending; and in the multitude falling, some cross the track of others, as they are thrown with more or less force.

"Such was the appearance of the above phenomenon to the inmates of my house. I walked into the park with two gentlemen of Pearl Street, feeling and confessing that this scene had never been figured to our minds by any book or mortal, save only by the prophet."-A correspondent in the *New York Journal of Commerce*, vol. 8, no. 534 (Nov. 16, 1833).

Was this a supernatural event? Again I say, "It does not matter." What does matter is that Jesus Christ selected a period of the earth's history, and precisely forecast a falling of the stars that would stand out so distinctly as to be a matter of general record and a sign of His return. The fact that more than a century has gone by since the falling of the stars merely adds to the significance of the times in which we live.

9. A WORLD OF FEAR

"There shall be upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." Luke 21:25, 26.

Fear! This is the word that has been written large within the heart of modern man. The most intelligent, the most highly informed, and those entrusted with the greatest responsibility of world

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leadership know that it is time to fear. Even when some say there is nothing to fear but fear, large sums are spent and great efforts are put forth lest men will not have enough fear. Leaders fear what is coming, and are afraid the people do not understand how terribly dangerous the situation is.

Dorothy Thompson, commentator, says: "The scientists are alarmed. They rush about warning that it is quite possible that the world may come to an end. People believe them, but it is almost as though they did not care much if the world came to an end. I never remember anything like this before in America."

Dr. Harold C. Urey, atomic bomb scientist, said in a Town Meeting of the Air broadcast, I am the apostle of doom. I am still a frightened man, and I wish you to be frightened."

Robert Hutchins, noted educator of the University of Chicago, in a widely quoted radio address, declared: "It is very late. Perhaps nothing can save us. But the handwriting on the wall is plain enough. It says to the people of the earth, 'Unite or die.'" He gave his opinion that some solution would need to be found within five years if the world was to be saved from disaster at some time not too far distant. "There is very little time remaining," he said.

Former President Truman was quoted in the New York Times as saying that if we had another war, "nothing would be left but a world reduced to rubble. Gone would be our hope for the greatest age in the history of mankind."

The late Field Marshal Jan Smuts of South Africa asserted, "Today there is no time to think things out. If we are not prepared we cannot recover ourselves or retrieve ourselves. Tomorrow the situation may be irretrievably lost."--Cited in Cape Times, March 2, 1948, p. 1.

The late Dr. Cyril Forster Garbett, archbishop of York, wrote, "The Biblical declaration that the end of the world will come suddenly is driven home to us with fresh meaning.... The writing on the wall of threatened doom and destruction can now be read clearly by all thoughtful men."--Diocesan letter, November, 1945.

When the late President John F. Kennedy made his first speech to the U.S. Congress he painted a dark picture of the world, one of the darkest of recent years.

So men are afraid-afraid of modern war with hydrogen bombs and disease-spreading bombs, and of possible utter devastation and destruction; afraid of peace with its perils of debt, its class struggles, its flouting of the laws of God and man, and its increasing sense of insecurity. Never has government tried to do so much for people. Never were people more dissatisfied and so disposed to seek protection from the cradle to the grave. More and more people are climbing into the "lap of government" for security.

Men talk about "the end of life on this star," "time running out," "the end of the world," and "doom and destruction."

What does this all mean? Two things. One, that the prophecy of Jesus Christ is being fulfilled before our very eyes, and His coming is drawing nigh, though the day and hour no man knows. The other is that men's hearts are full of the fear of man and things because they have lost the fear of God.

Carl Hambro, president of the much-talked-of League of Nations, is quoted from back in 1939 as saying, "Here at Geneva we have every fear but the fear of God." So it is. The fear that men need they do not have, and the fears they have, come as a result of not having the one fear that they need. If men loved God and feared to sin against His holy will, what a change would be seen in the picture of the world! "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Psalm 111:10.

10. THE WORLDWIDE GOSPEL

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matthew 24:14.

This is the climax of the signs that Jesus gave. Three points are made clear: (1) The gospel was to be preached to all the world in the period covered by the other signs. (2) This would serve as a witness to the nations. There is here no suggestion of world conversion to Christ; in fact, the array of signs already studied indicates the opposite of this idea. (3) When the worldwide witness has been given, "then shall the end come."

What are the facts concerning the giving of the simple gospel as it was brought out anew through the Protestant Reformation? There are five things to bear in mind.

First, from the days of Luther when the Reformation really began to move, more than 250 years passed before the churches began to take an interest in missions; that is, in giving the gospel to all the world. This does not indicate that nothing was being accomplished, because even under bitter persecution

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the Reformation had spread and rooted down. But as for the heathen, that was another thing. It is said that a young man in England rose in a meeting of the clergy. He unburdened his heart about giving the gospel to the heathen. The chairman of the meeting interrupted him and said, "Young man, sit down; when God is pleased to convert the heathen world, He will do it without your help or mine."

The second thing to remember is that a great and mighty change came as the world moved toward the year 1800. "It was then that for the first time since the apostolic period, occurred an outburst of general missionary zeal and activity. Beginning in Great Britain, it soon spread to the Continent and across the Atlantic. It was no mere push of fervor, but a mighty tide set in, which from that day to this has been steadily rising and spreading. . . . It was the plain people, the masses, that now began to pray and give and go, not tarrying in the least for king or prelate to hoist the signal." - DELAVAN L. LEONARD *A Hundred Year Missions*, pp. 69, 70.

The providential hour had struck for the gospel to go to all the world. The 1260 years of the church's night was to end in 1798. The period of persecution had been cut short. The sun was darkened May 19, 1780. Just twelve years later, in 1792, there was organized the Baptist Missionary Society, which sent William Carey to India the following year.

The date 1792 and the name William Carey mark the rising sun of modern missions. Leonard says, "We may speak of the 'Carey Epoch' with every whit as much propriety as of the Luther Reformation. We may as fitly term him the apostle to modern missions as Paul the apostle to the Gentiles." - *Ibid.*, p. 71.

In that same year three Moravian missionaries went to Africa to kindle again the light that flickered at the death of George Schmidt. In 1795 the London Missionary Society was founded. In 1797 it sent out five workers, including medical, to Africa. In 1806 young Samuel Mills entered Williams College at the age of twenty-three, and at the now-famous meeting under a haystack during a thunderstorm sparked the fire of foreign missions in America.

In 1807 the consecrated Robert Morrison, refused passage by the British East India Company, sailed to China from America. The shipping agent cynically remarked, "And so, Mr. Morrison, you really expect that you will make an impression on the idolatry of the great Chinese Empire?" "No, sir," replied Morrison, "I expect God will."

In 1808 in a room of old East College, Samuel Mills and his fellows organized what has been called the first foreign missionary society in America. To a friend he said, "Though you and I are very little beings, we must not rest satisfied until we have made our influence extend in the remotest corner of this ruined world." - CLIFFORD G. HOWELL, *The Advance Guard of Missions*, p. 139.

In 1810 these young men set their plans before the General Association of Independent Ministers of Massachusetts. "Shall we go to a heathen land under the patronage of a mission society of America, or seek connection with a European society?" That was the question. The answer was the birth of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the first such organization west of the Atlantic.

In 1812 Judson, Newell, Hall, and Rice sailed from America to India, following the trail blazed by Carey.

In 1813, at Blantyre, Scotland, there was born a baby boy destined under God to break open furrows in Africa from end to end and side to side. He was named David Livingstone. In 1816 the American Bible Society was founded.

In 1817 Robert Moffat, just turned twenty-one, landed at Cape Town, South Africa. This is the man who cried out, "O that I had a thousand lives, and a thousand bodies! All of them should be devoted to no other employment but to preach Christ to these degraded, despised, yet beloved mortals!"

Thus did the mighty tide of missions set in at the very time indicated in prophecy. A third observation is this. No sooner had this mission movement gained momentum than hundreds of ministers over the world began to preach with special emphasis and power the message of Christ's Second Coming.

A fourth significant fact is that at the very time this era of missions got under way modern inventions began to be born. In fact, just six years before Carey sailed to India, two men in Scotland built a steam engine pleasure boat, and John Fitch, of Philadelphia, navigated the Delaware with his steamboat. In 1793, the year Carey sailed, that famous American of Irish blood, Robert Fulton, was tinkering with the notion of applying steam to navigation. In 1807 he stepped into his renowned vessel, the *Clermont*, and drove it nearly 150 miles up the Hudson River to Albany, New York, in 32 hours. Power transportation was in use in the year that Morrison sailed for China. The God who gave us the gospel of His Son and of His Son's return was preparing the way for a rapid giving of the full gospel to the whole world.

And finally, at the very hour when the era of modern missions was being born, the earth was

bringing forth a new nation, destined to be the mightiest ever to appear on the earth. In 1793, when William Carey sailed to India, George Washington was serving his first term as the first President of the United States of America. Here was a rising republic dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. From this cradle of freedom consecrated men of religious fervor would travel to lands afar, supported by the prayers and the means of a gracious Providence. Could it be that this nation had some foreordained purpose specified in the prophecies of God?

CHRIST'S PERSONAL COUNSEL

In closing this survey of Christ's ten signs of His coming, turn to His own words for counsel. First, His explanation as to the meaning of the signs: "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place." Matthew 24:32-34, RSV. The generation living in the time of those signs connected with the destruction of Jerusalem lived to see the destruction come. The generation that today may see and recognize the signs ("all these things") of Christ's Second Coming-this generation will not pass until "all these things be fulfilled." When this gospel is "preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; then shall the end come." Verse 14, K.J.V.

Here is caution and admonition: "Of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Verse 36. "Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord does come." Verse 42.

The Savior's counsel of comfort and joy is given in these words: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws nigh." Luke 21:28. True believers in the Second Coming of Christ may agree with the leaders of our day that the world outlook is dark, but they know also that the up look is bright. "Look up, and lift up your heads," is the Savior's admonition.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

What difference does it make whether one concerns himself with this belief? Here is one thought: "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that bath this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure." 1 John 3:2, 3.

Another is given by the apostle Paul in almost his final words to the church before his execution: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." 2 Timothy 4:8.

An understanding love of His Second Coming will tend to purify the life. Sincere faith in the glorious prospect brings a power to prepare for it. Belief in the soon return of Christ intensifies the desire for quick and thorough preparation. As the moment draws near for the departing of a train, the passengers make doubly sure that everything is ready.

"Lift up the trumpet, and loud let it ring: Jesus is coming again!
Cheer up, you pilgrims, be joyful and sing; Jesus is coming again!"

JESSIE E. STROUT

25. Christ and the Modern Floodlights

IMAGINE the present population of the world, nearly three billion, seated in a vast outdoor amphitheater. It is in the time just preceding the year 1800. The United States of America has been born as a nation with clear marks of destiny upon it. George Washington is its first President.

It is night. The moon sheds its light upon the three billion human beings seated in the gigantic bowl. Great candles compete with moonbeams to light the central arena.

Suddenly a small battery of floodlights is switched on. The moon turns slightly pale. The candles become a little more yellow. A second battery of lights comes on. Then a third. The moon looks sickly. The candlelight is becoming lost in the glow of something men have not seen before. When the floodlights of