

## **"Can Ye Not Discern the Signs of the Times?" (parts 1 & 2)**

Matthew 16:1-4 (cf. Luke 12:54-56)

What comes to your mind when you hear someone say, "It's a sign of the times?" If you're from my generation, you might think of a hit song in 1966 by Petula Clark—*"It's A Sign of the Times."*

We often use this expression when we see something that has become a part of our lives that is different from the way things used to be. *"The signs of the times"* point to some changes going on in our world. When you see someone texting on a smart phone, "It's a sign of the times."

It is not a new expression as we see in our text.

The question Jesus asks is a rebuke of the Jewish leaders for being better at predicting the weather than discerning *"the signs of the times."* They could understand the signs in the sky, but failed to understand the prophecies that predicted His coming.

The religious leaders of Christ's day should have known when Messiah would come. The Old Testament prophets foretold of certain "signs" that would indicate His coming:

- Born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14)
- Born at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- Come from Nazareth (Isa. 11:1; Mt. 2:23)
- Be a lowly man with no outward beauty or comeliness (Isa. 53).
- Recovering sight to the blind (Isa. 35:5; 42:7; Luke 4:18; John 9; Mt. 11:5).
- Speak in parables (Ps. 78:2; Mt. 13:35).
- Ride into Jerusalem on the colt **on a specific date** to present Himself as King (Zech. 9:9; Dan 9; Mt. 21:5)

Jesus literally fulfilled all the prophecies of His first coming (over 300). He will also fulfill all the prophetic "signs" of His second coming.

The question Jesus asked in our text 2,000 years ago, could be asked of us today. We can read the signs of the weather, but are we reading the prophetic signs all around us. As the Pharisees failed to discern signs of Christ's first coming, many today are oblivious to the signs that point to

Christ's second coming. They can predict a storm in the sky, but they cannot foresee the coming storm of God's judgment.

Today weathermen have sophisticated satellites, barometers, radar, and computer simulations to forecast the weather. Yet, they only predict in percentages: 20% chance of rain... 30% chance of rain... etc. On a national average, weathermen are about 40% accurate.

Yet, people are more faithful to tune into the evening news to hear what Steve Pool says about the weather forecast than studying what the Bible says about "*the signs of the times.*" Some put more stock in "Punxsutawney Phil" seeing it's shadow than they do Bible prophecy.

These "*signs of the times*" are "warning" signs of the approaching storm of God's judgment that will precede Christ's coming. When we see these warning signs, it should alert us to prepare and be ready.

➡ **"The times" are marked by "signs."** Remember "*the signs*" are given to the Jews, not us Gentiles—"The Jews require A SIGN, and the Greeks [Gentiles] seek after wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22; Ex. 4:8, 30). "*The signs*" point to Christ's second coming at the end of the seven year tribulation period (Mt. 24:3). There are **no signs specifically that point to the rapture** of the church.

That does not mean you and I cannot learn something from "*the signs*" that point to Christ's second coming. For example: Suppose you are driving north on Hwy. 16 from Tacoma to Port Orchard. You see a sign that says 25 miles to Bremerton. You are not going to Bremerton. Your going to Port Orchard. But you know that Port Orchard comes before Bremerton. The next sign says, 20 miles to Bremerton. That means you are five miles closer to Port Orchard.

As we "*discern the signs of the times*" being fulfilled pointing to Christ's coming at the end of the Tribulation, and we know the rapture of the church comes seven years before that, we must be getting close to the sound of the trumpet.

➡ Let's be clear—The rapture is imminent! Nothing needs to be fulfilled for the Lord to come in the clouds and call us out of here! We could be raptured at any moment!

We are not “sign seekers” (Mt. 16:4). However, while “*the signs*” may not be for us *doctrinally*, but we can be encouraged by them knowing it won’t be long until we’ll hear the trumpet calling us to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

The Bible gives us clear indications of what the “end times” will be like so we will not be caught off guard (see 1 Thess. 5:1-4)!

I.M. Haldeman pastored the First Baptist Church in New York City from 1884–1933. He wrote a book titled, “*The Signs of the Times*” in 1910. In this book he refers to “signs” of Christ’s second coming. Here are a few:

- The rise of modernism (Chapters 3 & 4—“The Progress of the Devil’s Lie;” “Jericho Theology”)
  - The conforming of the church to the world (Chapter 2—“The Faith” pp. 35-37, 47).
  - The rise of a social gospel (Chapter 5—“The New Religion”)
  - The rise of humanism (Chapter 6—“Thinking Above What is Written”)
  - The rise of socialism (Chapter 10)
  - The rise of psychotherapy — metaphysical / mind healing (chapter 11—“Emmanuelism”)
  - A global government (Chapter 14—“The Parliament of Nations”). We are not far away from a one-world government and cashless society.
  - Regathering of Jew to Palestine (Chapter 15—“The Zionist Movement”)
- ➡ The restoration of Israel as a nation is one of the most significant indicators of the nearness of Christ’s coming.

In 70 AD, Titus the Roman entered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. The Jews were scattered among the nations (James 1:1). They remained a people without a country. Numbers 23:9 prophesied Israel “*shall not be reckoned among the nations.*” They would remain a distinct and separate people—Truly a miracle of survival. There were plenty of biblical nations who have been wiped away. Can you find me a Moabite? A Perrizite? An Edomite? An Ammonite? No. But you don’t have any trouble finding an Israelite!

In 1948 the United Nations declared Israel a nation and returned the land of Palestine to them. Israel was reborn as prophesied.

- The prophet Amos wrote: *“I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.”* (Amos 9:14-15).
- Notice what Jesus said in Luke 21:24-32.

Israel is in the news on a daily basis. The world’s attention is upon to this small nation for one important reason: It will play a key role in the return of Christ. So this is a *“sign of the times”* we cannot ignore.

- ➔ The rise of Russia as a world power and persecutor of Israel is also a *“sign of the times”* (See Scofield note at Ezekiel 38:2—written in 1909.)
- ➔ Technology for a cashless society exists today (Rev. 13:16-18).

**I. These are DARK times** (1 Thess. 5:1-6). Spiritually, politically, morally.

**II. These are DECEPTIVE times** (1 Tim. 4:1-4; Mt. 24:11; 2 Pet. 2:1-2).

- ➔ More cults and damnable heresies have cropped up during the last 200 years than all church history put together.
  - Mormonism
  - Scientology
  - Unitarian
  - Wicca
  - Jehovah Witnesses
  - British Israelism
  - Unification Church (Moonies)
  - “Jesus Only” — Oneness Pentecostalism (1913)
  - The Church Universal and Triumphant (Elizabeth Clare Prophet)
  - Transcendental Meditation

**III. These are DANGEROUS times** (2 Tim. 3:1). **Perilous** — Difficult.

- ➔ **Characteristics of the last days:**

1. **Love of self** (v. 2). Focus on “self-esteem.” Magazines: *Life... People... Us... Self*
2. **Covetous**. Is behind all sin (1 Tim. 6:10; Col. 3:5). Discontentment.
3. **Boasters**— Self exaltation. Taking credit for success (Eph. 2:9).
4. **Pride**—Exaggerated self-importance.
5. **Blasphemy**—Evil speaking regarding God. Contempt for the things of God. Taking God’s name in vain. No fear of God. God is ridiculed daily in every form of media.
6. **Disobedient to parents**—Rejection of God ordained authority. Disrespect. Open defiance. Rebellion. If a child will not obey those who love him most, who will he obey?
7. **Unthankful**—Refusal to recognize everything we have comes from God (1 Cor. 4:7; James 1:17; John 3:27 cf. Rom. 1:21).
8. **Unholy**—Irreverent. Holy = Separate from defilement (Heb. 7:26). Examples of unholy things: Tobacco; drugs; pornography; profanity; fornication (see 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:16).
9. **Without natural affection** (v. 3 cf. Rom. 1:24-27). Natural affection is a man loving a woman... a woman loving a man... a parent loving their children... a child loving his parents.
10. **Trucebreakers**—Failing to honor treaties. Breaking contracts/agreements. Breaking marriage vows. Failures to repay loans. In 2005, one out of every 55 households filed for bankruptcy.
11. **False accusers**—Refusal to accept blame; blaming others (cf. Rev. 12:9-10).
12. **Incontinent**—No self-control; undisciplined; unrestrained fleshly appetites. Lack of character.
13. **Fierce**— Violent; vicious; cruel; brutal. Terrorism; drive by shootings; suicide bombers; beheadings; horror movies.
14. **Despisers of those that are good** (cf. Ps. 11:2). Our heroes used to be godly men and women who possessed traits of virtue. Today godly people are ridiculed while evil men and women are glamorized.

15. **Traitors** (v. 4). Betrayers; disloyal.
16. **Heady**— “*Heady*” comes from the word “head” which means “to go first; to lead” as “to head up the team.” It is to act without thinking of the consequences. Hasty; head-strong; reckless.
17. **Highminded**—Haughtiness. Elevating one’s self-importance. Puffed-up; with vain conceit of their intelligence and abilities; insolent; domineering (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 8:2; Gal. 6:3).
18. **Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God**. Hedonistic society—Four bartenders / barmaids for every pastor in the U.S. Americans spend fourteen times as much on recreation in one year than all missionary contributions combined.
- God is displaced by the constant pursuit of pleasure! Pleasure and forms of amusement become **idols**—Boats, campers, RV’s, TV, sports, parties, alcoholic drinks, drugs.
  - Relentlessly pushing the “pleasure button” in our mind—overloading a nervous system that is not designed to be continuously stimulated. The result is *an-he-don-ia*, a condition when our brains lose the capacity to give us pleasure and need a greater stimulus.
  - “We cannot fully experience the joy that comes from God when our brains are over-stimulated.” That is, the more we indulge in carnal pleasures, the less our capacity to enjoy spiritual things.
19. **Powerless religion** (v. 5). Empty religious activity void of power. Miracles explained away; the Bible is allegorized; no salvation.
20. **Ever learning** yet ignorant of truth (v. 7 cf. Dan. 12:4).

#### **IV. These are DISPARAGING times** (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

➡ **Scoffers**—Those who disregard or belittle the signs. Continuing to live like nothing is going to happen.

Just prior to the eruption of Mt. Saint Helens, there were definite warning signs of seismic activity beneath the mountain. Geologists sent out warnings of an impending eruption to inhabitants within the vicinity of the mountain. One of those who was warned repeat-

edly was Harry Randall Truman, otherwise known as “Old Harry.” He was the caretaker of the Mount St. Helens Lodge at the foot of the mountain. Despite the clear warning signs of imminent danger, “Old Harry” paid no attention to them and refused to leave. He *scoffed* at the warnings saying, “that mountain just doesn’t dare blow up on me. I’ve walked that mountain for 50 years. I know her. If it erupts with lava it’s not going to get me at Spirit Lake!”<sup>1</sup>

On May 18, 1980 Mt. St. Helens erupted killing “Old Harry” and burying the site of his lodge under 150 feet of volcanic ash. “Old Harry” died because he scoffed at the “signs” of imminent danger!

**V. These are DEVIANT times** (Mt. 24:12). Things are perverted. Moral decay abounds.

- Being “ethnically sensitive” has become more important than being sensitive to what is ethical.
- Truth is relative.
- Education holds all the answers.
- Physical health is promoted over spiritual health.
- The psychologist and pharmacist have replaced the prophet the preacher.
- Chemicals and lies are preferred over repentance and faith to answer life’s problems.
- Pornography is considered freedom of speech.
- Controversy over rest-rooms! What *“a sign of the times!”*
- Children in public schools are taught to honor the planet while forbidden to mention the God who created it.
- Christians complain about the 10 Commandments being removed from our schools, but fail to teach them to their children at home!
- The paint on houses lasts longer than the families inside the house.
- Right and good are defined by whatever makes our lives on this earth prosperous, happier and longer!

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<sup>1</sup> *The Bulletin*, May 21, 1980 [[https://news.google.co.uk/newspapers?id=saISAAAIBA&sjid=\\_vY-DAAAAIBA&pg=4718,5357603&dq=&hl=en](https://news.google.co.uk/newspapers?id=saISAAAIBA&sjid=_vY-DAAAAIBA&pg=4718,5357603&dq=&hl=en)]

**SUMMATION:** Times of peril ... perversion... pleasure... persecution.

Someone says, “It looks like rain.” You see the darkening sky and rumbling of distant thunder and say, “Yes it does. Looks like we’re in for a big storm.” So what do you do? You prepare for the coming storm. You roll up your car windows... you head for shelter.

Yet, when we look at what is happening around the world, we pay no mind to what is coming. We see the storm clouds gathering, but change nothing in our lives. We speak no warning to others about what is approaching. We just continue living as everything is going to be OK.

In cities within “tornado alley” there are sirens that signal a warning of the imminent possibility of a tornado. When these sirens sound it is an alert to take cover or head for a shelter. A person would be foolish to ignore or not recognize what these warning signs meant.

I ask, as Jesus asked, “*O ye hypocrites*”—How is it you can discern the signs in the sky, but you do not discern the signs of the times?” Wake up! Your redemption draweth nigh!

As we see these things happening, we should NOT be discouraged—we should be encouraged. We should be challenged to intensify our efforts to get the gospel with everyone we meet.