

# **FORERUNNER SCHOOL OF MINISTRY – DAVID SLIKER**

*KNOWING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES (MT. 24:33)*

## **Three Timing Indicators of the Return of Christ – Kingdom Gospel (Matt. 24:14)**

### **I. REVIEW: UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

<sup>32</sup> **Learn this parable from the fig tree:** *When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near--at the doors! 34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words (prophecies) will by no means pass away. (Matthew 24:32–35)*

A. There are many prophesied signs in Scripture that mark the final generation as unique. These signs give us the understanding that we are in a unique season in redemptive history. Yet many make wrong assumptions regarding Matthew 24:36 and 44:

1. ***Wrong assumption #1:*** “No one can know the day or the hour,” which would falsely imply a sudden, unexpected departure. No one can know the day or the hour, but Jesus Himself made clear that we could (and should) know the season, or the *generation*, of His return. ***Wrong assumption #2:*** “No one will ever know the day or the hour.” It is true that “of that day” no one knows, only the Father Himself. That does not mean, however, that we will never know the time of His coming.

B. There are three types of biblical “indicators” that indicate to the generation in which the Lord returns that His coming is near:

- 1). ***Sign events:*** these are predicted in Scripture and alert us to the timing of Jesus’ return.
- 2). ***Sign trends:*** both positive and negative sign trends will signal His coming
- 3). ***Prophetic experiences:*** subjective personal experiences alert us to the end times.

### **II. REVIEW: JESUS CONNECTED THREE KEY EVENTS TO HIS RETURN**

A. There are **three key sign trends** that strongly indicate that we are in the generation of the Lord’s return. Jesus personally connected the timing of His return to the earth to three events that are all emerging simultaneously in this hour of history:

1. Jesus connected the timing of His return to the **repentance and revival of Jewish political and spiritual leaders in Jerusalem** in Matthew 23:37-39; to **the preaching of the gospel throughout the whole earth** in Matthew 24:14; and to **night and day prayer** happening on the earth in Luke 18:7-8.

B. All three trends are, in a clear, measurable way, happening in this generation in a manner that is unique to any other time in redemptive history. Messianic (Jewish) congregations of believers in Israel and Jerusalem are experiencing more growth through conversions than any time in church history since the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

- C. There has been a notable statistical increase in particular over the past ten years. This trend is one that has also been reflected in the modern missions world: a notable spike in the increase of church planting and world evangelism over the past decade alone. The recent increase of night and day prayer across the earth is unique in any generation throughout church history – this is a historic hour for prayer initiatives (24/7 and otherwise), prayer gatherings, stadium gatherings, and the planting of houses of prayer worldwide.

### **III. THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD (MATT. 24:14)**

***<sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:14)***

- A. The word of God prophesies about the greatest harvest of souls the earth has ever witnessed – John the Apostle saw an “uncountable multitude” standing on the sea of glass as those who had come out of the great tribulation and shaking of the end-times:

***<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes...<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” <sup>14</sup> I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:9, 13-14)***

1. This passage is not representative of every group or generation of believers in redemptive history. John is seeing a *specific* group of believers, whose identity, tenderness, and devotion is something that the elder wants John to take note of. There is a time frame of history attached to this uncountable multitude: *the great tribulation*. They have joined the heavenly assembly of Chapter 4 as ones who have a position of great honor. The phrase leaves open the possibility that *they are still pouring into the room*.
2. Imagine the progression of what John sees: a heavenly throne room filled with living creatures, esteemed elders, a myriad of angels – and One seated on a throne who gives a scroll to the Lamb slain before the foundations of the world. The Lamb opens the seals, all hell breaks loose on the earth: men rage, demons stir, there is divine activity, shaking, and sealing – and suddenly John sees the throne room filled with joyous, happy, victorious people. The verb used to denote “crying out” related to their praise is that is *continual*, just like that of the creatures they are joining – they never stop thanking Jesus for their salvation and deliverance – and they do so with a *loud* voice.

3. These ones coming out of that horrific time in history emerge having “washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb” – they have taken their priestly robes, stained by sin and disobedience, and washed them in “red” to make them “white”. They have rigorously cleansed their minds and hearts through continual identification and agreement in faith with the Worthy One who was slain in Chapter 5. Their victory and joy, as would be noted later in Chapter 12, was knit to three things:

***10 Then I heard a loud voice saying...“Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come...11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:10-11)***

4. The ones who overcame unto victory and joy in the great harvest did so because of a depth of devotion and sacrificial love and abandonment that the Bride of Christ will exemplify before the nations just before the return of Christ. The manner in which they will “wash their garments” until they were white in purity will be knit to the power of the blood of Jesus to bring them into deep obedience and agreement that reflects the Lamb they are devoted to. **The coming global harvest will have more than uncountable numbers but unmatched corporate devotion, purity, and depth of commitment to Christ before His return.**

B. We are already seeing the beginning of the beginning of a global harvest unlike any other period in history: the Gospel has been preached to four billion people; churches exist in all 251 nations and territories of the earth; and the Bible has been translated into 2,062 languages available to 98 percent of the world’s population. Every Home For Christ reports that their organization is now planting churches at the current rate of 10,000 *per month* globally.

1. We are alive during the time of the greatest harvest of souls in church history. In 1800, nearly 75% of the global population had never heard the gospel – and today, after the global population has multiplied seven times, only 25% of the global population remains unevangelized, as of 2007.<sup>1</sup>
2. In thirty years time, the number of people watching Christian television has exploded from 750 million to 3.8 billion. Looking again to 1800 as a benchmark, one billion dollars a year was given annually at that time to churches and parachurch ministries. Today, 870 billion dollars a year is given to Christian causes – 300 billion dollars given to churches alone.<sup>2</sup>

C. We are, by most estimates, in the generation that will see the earth evangelized, with a witness of the gospel established amongst every tribe, tongue, and nation on the earth:

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<sup>1</sup> International Bulletin of Missionary Research, January 2007. David B. Barrett & Todd M. Johnson.

<sup>2</sup> International Bulletin of Missionary Research, January 2007. David B. Barrett & Todd M. Johnson.

1. For example, the Wycliffe Bible Society began the “Vision 2025” project in 1999, attempting to translate the Bible in every known language – and began at a rate of one completed translation every 18 days; now in 2008, this rate has accelerated to one completed translation every five days. In other words, in under a decade they have shortened the completion date from the year 2150 to the year 2038 through current technological advances.<sup>3</sup>
  2. In 30 years, The Jesus Film has currently been shown in 229 countries and territories (out of 245) – more regions than FedEx can deliver to (220) or Coke can reach (200).<sup>4</sup> Over six billion people have viewed the film, with a decision for Christ being made every four seconds somewhere around the world totaling 225,873,101 decisions for Christ.<sup>5</sup> Steve Douglass (President of Campus Crusade For Christ) and Loren Cunningham (Founder of Youth With A Mission) are together stating publically that the task of reaching the earth for the gospel can be finished within their lifetime – possibly within the next ten years.
- D. Jesus knit the filling of the earth with “this gospel of the kingdom” to His return, and the arrival of “the end”. There is more to do than *finishing the task* in terms of the depth of preparation and devotion necessary to establish the kind of *witness (martyrion – “testimony”)* Jesus was speaking of filling the earth with before His return. The encouragement we draw from the historic time we live in related to missions and evangelism is that the global missions movements of the past three hundred years are about to complete a monumental task – and have stunningly prepared the way for the final stages of the plans of God to shake the earth and bring His Son to the planet to birth another age.

#### IV. “THE END” = THE BIRTH OF ANOTHER AGE (JOHN 16:21)

- A. The Bible uses the metaphor of a “birthing process” to describe the nature of how the coming Millennial Kingdom would be established (cf. Jn. 16:21; Jer. 30:5-7). There will be great trouble, shaking, pain, and distress related to the transition of one era of history to the next. It will be the most difficult, violent, disruptive, painful, glorious, perilous transitions in all of history. The exultation of the saints of Revelation 7 becomes clearer related to understanding their awareness of God’s powerful “wind” at their back helping them cross the finish line.
- B. Persecution has increased exponentially in the 20th and 21st centuries compared to other eras of church history, as documented by the *Voice of the Martyrs* organization. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001) the number of martyrs recorded over 1,900 years of church history equaled 24.6 million. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, there were 45.4 million martyrs across the earth.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.wycliffe.org](http://www.wycliffe.org) - Wycliffe Translation Society website statistics

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ccci.org/ministries/jesus-film> - Campus Crusade For Christ International website

<sup>5</sup> [www.jesusfilm.org](http://www.jesusfilm.org) - Film and Media Statistics

**V. THE BIRTH PANGS INITIATE THE BEGINNING OF THE END (MATT. 24:4-8)**

- A. The season of Christ’s return and the transition to the next phase of history will be one in which every level of society will be shaken by the activity of God. The shaking of the earth (Heb. 12:26) will begin like the early contractions of the birth process that indicate that the labor process is beginning.
- B. Jesus spoke of “birth pangs” that would signal to the church that the time of the end was beginning – yet they were *not to be troubled* during these early “tremors”:
- C. **“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many”** (verse 5). The context has been established in Israel for many to emerge as false political “messiahs” who, in the minds of some, will help deliver Israel from her enemies and establish the fullness of the Torah as law again nationally. These false leaders may also be instrumental in instigating the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. Daniel 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:3–4).
- D. **“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars . . . For nation will rise against nation (*ethnic group against ethnic group*), and kingdom against kingdom”** (verses 6–7). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century alone, 100 million people were killed in war; 1993 saw a record number of wars fought in one year (29). This was the first century to see global conflict of any kind. Ethnic conflicts and genocides, already increasing in number and frequency, will become widespread.
- E. **“And there will be famines”** (verse 7). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 864 million people worldwide were under-nourished between 2002-2004<sup>6</sup>. In 2007 in Sub-Saharan Africa, one in every three persons were undernourished, with famine also afflicting South Asia, who reported 299 million underfed, followed by East Asia (225 million).<sup>7</sup> This global condition will begin to afflict the wealthier nations of the earth as well.
- F. “. . . **pestilences**” (verse 7). Cancer was virtually unheard of hundreds of years ago; now over 100 different kinds of cancer kill over 5 million people per year. The AIDS virus alone has killed tens of millions. New and untreatable strands of malaria, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, cholera, and the Black Death have emerged over the last 10 years.
- G. “. . . **and earthquakes** in various places ” (verse 7.) One of the critical signs of the times to watch for, according to Jesus, was the reality of “earthquakes in various places.” They will be a precursor to the coming cataclysmic earthquakes described in the book of Revelation, which will be greater in scope and destructive force than any other earthquakes in history. These earthquakes, like the increase in famine and pestilence, will eventually shift the global mood drastically and create a greater desperation in a greater number of people for social and societal change.

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<sup>6</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations food security statistics, 2006

<sup>7</sup> World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development, p. 94

**VI. THE BIRTHING BEGINS: EARLY LABOR (MATT. 24:9-14)**

- A. In the next section of Matthew 24, Jesus shifts to the next phase of the trouble: believers that were ***not to be troubled*** in the earlier events would now experience ***much trouble*** at the hands of persecutors and murderers within *all nations* who hate Jesus and His church. Offense, betrayal, and hatred will be a troubling part of the life of *many* believers (and unbelievers); this will be followed by a period of great deception through the ministry of false prophets and false teaching.
- B. Lawlessness, love of self, love of pleasure, and false forms of godliness (2 Tim. 3:1-5) will lead to the destabilization of societies, regions, and governments globally as “love grows cold”.
- C. Jesus interjects with two encouragements: first (v. 13), that there will be salvation for those who endure to the end (Rev. 7:10; 14:13); second (v. 14), that the whole earth during that time will be filled with a faithful witness of the coming kingdom.

**VII. THE FINAL STAGE: ACTIVE LABOR (MATT. 24:15-28)**

- A. Jesus finishes by describing briefly the intensity of the ***most troubling*** time in human history – the Great Tribulation mentioned in Revelation 7 by the elder to John. This is the 3 ½ year time frame of “active labor” in which the pain and agony will be the worst for everyone – if these days were any longer than 3 ½ years, “no flesh” would survive the intensity of it (Matt. 24:22).

**VIII. THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM FINISHES THE BIRTHING PROCESS (MATT. 24:14)**

- A. The intensity of the coming hour *requires* in the mercy and justice of God an intense *witness* knit to an intense *message*. The message that God will establish across the earth in the days to come is the witness (testimony) of the victorious saints of Revelation. The “word of their testimony” (witness) is dynamically linked to their overcoming the great trouble that is thrown at them by a wicked world leader and his demonic plan.
- B. God’s plan is to fill the earth with this victorious testimony before the end comes. It is according to His perfect mercy *and* His perfect justice to establish a witness for all to hear and be given an opportunity to respond. Every human being alive during that time will have a real awareness and recognition of the coming of the Lamb of God to conquer the earth and take full possession of the nations:

*<sup>15</sup> And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves...<sup>16</sup> and said...“Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! <sup>17</sup> For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:15-17)*

- C. The *testimony* (witness) of the saints in that day will produce the *testimony* of the kings, great men, rich men, commanders, mighty men, every slave and every free man. The gospel of the kingdom is the proclamation of the church of the “good tidings” to the earth of the coming of the **Jewish King of Israel** to claim His inheritance in the nations. It is the “full” gospel message of forgiveness, grace, and mercy in the context of the coming King and the establishment of His kingdom. The message that will fill the earth in that hour will be that of Psalm 2:

*11 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 **Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.** 12 **Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way...Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.** (Ps. 2:10-12)*

- D. **Conclusion:** The current trend of global evangelism is our “alert” from heaven to prepare *now* to live as a vibrant, effective witness in a manner that represents and embodies the heart of the Lamb whom we love and serve. The prophets challenged Israel in light of the coming judgment and destruction of that generation with a call to the **first things** (repentance or turning to renewed devotion to God) and a vision for the **last things** (establishment of the kingdom).