

I. THE PRECURSORY SIGNS (the “running before” signs)

A. Having looked at the different “schools” of Millennial eschatology we turn to the signs.

1. Both Premillennial Dispensationalism and Postmillennialism reject the signs.

- a. For the Postmillennialists all the signs were fulfilled in the period around AD 70. Although there may be further events (war, famine, etc) these are not signs *for the church*.
- b. For the Premillennial Dispensationalists the signs promised in the Bible are for a future reconstituted Israel and the saints alive after the rapture. The rapture will happen at any moment without signs [Premillennial Disp. do like to watch political events in the Middle East though!].

2. But Christ teaches us to expect to see signs in history of His Coming.

- a. These signs do not enable us to calculate the date of Christ’s Coming (Matt. 24:36).
- b. These signs are *not* like road signs *measuring distance* to our destination. The signs of Christ’s Coming do not merely point to Christ’s Coming. They are indications of His Coming, they bring about His Coming, they are the way in which He comes and they are part of His Coming.
- c. The signs tell us that Christ is at the Right Hand of God and that He is on His way. They are encouragements to us to watch and pray; and they are warnings to the wicked of coming judgment. The best illustration is a thunderstorm (changes in atmospheric pressure, darkening of the skies, distant rumbling of thunder all indicate the coming of a storm and are part of the storm’s coming). (Matt. 26:64 teaches that as soon as Christ ascended He started coming again).

B. The classic passage on the signs of Christ’s Coming is Matthew 24 (and parallel passages)

1. In Matthew 24 Jesus announces that the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed.

- a. To this shocking revelation the disciples ask two questions: when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? (Matt. 24:3).
- b. Jesus answers both questions but He blends the answers into one discourse. Some aspects of His answer apply to the entire NT age and the Second Coming; some aspects of His answer apply to the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem; and some aspects of His answer apply to both.
- c. Jesus really makes the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 a type or picture of the end of the world. This is common in Scripture and esp. among the prophets [prophetic foreshortening].

2. At this point both Postmillennialism and Premillennial Dispensationalism go wrong.

- a. The Premillennial Dispensationalist applies everything in Matthew 24 to the destruction of a future rebuilt temple in a future restored Jerusalem by a future Antichrist after a future rapture. Then Jesus never answered the disciples’ question about the temple then standing! (vv.2-3).
- b. The Postmillennialist applies everything (at least to v. 34) to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70; but this leads to many forced interpretations and makes Matthew 24 irrelevant to the church.
- c. We teach the precursory signs are signs *to us*, not merely to the church of the past or the future.

II. THREE TYPES OF PRECURSORY SIGNS

A. First, there are the signs which occur in the creation (Matt. 24:6-8; Luke 21:11, 25)

1. These signs are the most “headline-grabbing” because they are the most dramatic.

- a. The world calls these signs “natural disasters.” For the church they are signs, because they show us that Christ is at the Right Hand of the Father and that He is sending these (Rev. 6).
- b. These signs have been occurring throughout history but since Christ’s Ascension He has been sending them with *increasing frequency and intensity* and we should expect more before the end.
- c. Jesus tells us that these things are “only the beginning of sorrows” and that the end is “not yet” (Matt. 24:6-8). The sorrows are “birth pangs” or “labour pains.” They are sharp, painful, sudden, increase in frequency and intensity towards the end and bring about the “birth” of a new world.

2. The purpose of these signs is to bring judgment upon an increasingly wicked world.

- a. When Christ sends these signs it is to remind the world that He is judge and that this present world is not permanent (see Romans 8:22-23 and Hebrews 12:26-28).

- b. The church must see in these signs footsteps of the coming of Christ. As the signs intensify and become more frequent the church must know that Christ is coming quickly.
- c. These “natural disasters” are good for the church because God saves us in the way of bringing devastation upon the wicked world. But we must not expect to be unaffected by these things. We remain on the earth when these things are happening.

B. Second, there are the signs which occur in the world of nations (Matt. 24:6, 12)

1. The nations will increase in wickedness during the NT age (“iniquity shall abound”).

- a. Iniquity is “lawlessness”: men and societies will develop in open, flagrant, deliberate disobedience against God’s law. Man in the last days will cast off all restraint (II Tim. 3:1-4).
- b. This, too, is part of God’s purpose with the NT age: man must develop in wickedness until the cup of his iniquity as been filled. Then Christ shall come in judgment upon a ripened world.
- c. The fullest development of wickedness will be worldwide kingdom of Antichrist before the end.

2. From the wicked nations of the world Christ will take away peace (Matt. 24:6; Rev. 6:4).

- a. War, unrest, violence will characterize the nations of men in the NT age: the dream of earthly peace will not be realized until just before the end when Antichrist will achieve it for a time.
- b. War is necessary so that the church can do her work of preaching the Gospel. If the wicked world could live in peace and could solve all its social problems the world would concentrate its efforts on eradicating the church from the earth which is what the world *will do* under Antichrist.
- c. The church is not interested in world peace, eradicating poverty, promoting environmentalism. These things distract the church from her real calling, and distract the world from destroying the church. Christ comes by these things, sending them even in answer to our prayers (Rev. 8:1-5).

3. The nations of the wicked world will persecute the church (Matt. 24:9-10, 21-22; Rev. 6:9-11).

- a. Persecution has been a reality for Christians from the beginning and will continue through the NT age. As the end approaches persecution will increase until the Great Tribulation under the kingdom of Antichrist.
- b. The Postmillennialists place all the prophecies of persecution in the past; and the Premillennialists place them all in the future after the rapture.
- c. But persecution is a sign to the church that Christ is ruling and on His way; and Rev. 20:4 assures us that the persecuted saints will reign with Christ after death in the soul.

4. All of these signs are the filling up of three cups in the history of the NT age.

- a. The cup of man’s wickedness is filled as he develops in evil so that sin can reach its full potential and be seen as exceedingly wicked (Matt. 23:32)
- b. The cup of the sufferings of Christ’s body is filled as the church endures persecution (Col. 1:24)
- c. The cup of God’s wrath is filled as the world ripens in its iniquity (Rev. 15:1)

C. Third, there are the signs which occur in the church.

1. The main sign and the sign which determines all other signs is the preaching of the Gospel.

- a. About the other signs Jesus says, “the end is *not yet*,” but about this “and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14).
- b. Despite the turmoil and persecution which the church faces the Gospel *will be preached*.
- c. This worldwide preaching is necessary to gather the elect and leave a testimony to all nations.
- d. Only at the very end, when Antichrist rules, will the church be prevented from preaching.

2. The second sign in the church is apostasy and false teachers in the church (Matt. 24:5, 10-12, 24; II Thess. 2:3).

- a. Apostasy is a falling away from the truth by those individuals and churches which made a profession of believing the truth. The heathen cannot apostatize: only professing Christians can.
- b. Apostasy will be caused by a lack of love for the truth, an unwillingness to suffer for the truth and will be aided and abetted by Satan working through false teachers (II Thess. 2:10-13).
- c. Apostasy shall culminate in the coming of Antichrist himself. *Next time, DV, we look at the coming of Antichrist and then at the coming of Jesus Christ Himself in great power and glory.*