

# Signs Of The Times I

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church  
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"Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.' Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?'" Matthew 24:1-3.

It was Tuesday of Passion Week, probably the most completely reported day in Scripture of Jesus' life. Jesus had spent much of the day in discussion with the religious leaders, and had left the temple with the sad lament, "your house is left to you desolate." Matthew 23:38. Only the *day before*, He had called the temple "My house," saying, "My house shall be called a house of prayer. Matthew 21:13. Israel's rejection of her Lord was beginning to crystallize.

So, as they left the place of worship, the disciples pointed out the impressive stonework on the temple. This was not Solomon's temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Zerubbabel's temple was the one that replaced it, which had recently undergone about a half-century's worth of renovation under the guidance of Herod.

If the foundation stones, originally quarried by Solomon were still the ones in place, they were indeed impressive. Some of those were eight feet wide by six feet high by 60 or 70 feet in length! No wonder they elicited the admiration of the disciples. But Jesus said that those very stones would not be left one on top

of another, by an event which they inferred to be the end of the age. No doubt they were thinking of Jesus' speaking of the "desolation" that would come against Jerusalem foretold by Daniel, when He had said, "your house is left to you *desolate*."

As they were on the Mount of Olives, on the hillside to the east of Jerusalem, His disciples asked Him more about this. "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?'" Matthew 24:3.

There's one word that stands out to me in that verse, but I want to delay that point for now. Jesus proceeded to answer the disciples' question. I find in the Bible that Jesus always answered the questions of sincere seekers. It may not have been the answer they were looking for, but it was the right answer. I find that to be true in my life as well, as I'm sure you do too. I'm prepared to say that He doesn't really "give" the answer, He is the Answer. I appreciate the closing line of that favorite Gospel hymn, Live Out Thy Life Within Me, "Be Thou the glorious answer to all my questionings."

Notice that His answer is more than what they asked for. How characteristic this is of God! The disciples asked, "What will be the *sign* of Your coming?" The word "sign" is in the singular form, isn't it? Did Jesus give them what they asked for and describe *one* sign? No! He proceeded to list a multitude of signs that would be clues for the believer.

From the top of Olivet, His answer was what we might call the *other* "Sermon On The Mount." He had opened His ministry by outlining the principles of and pathway to His spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of grace, and now He closes His ministry by describing the events that will precede the arrival of His literal kingdom, the kingdom of His glory, and the character of the people who will partake of it.

The answer He gave is a blended answer because the question the disciples presented actually encompassed more than one event. In their naiveté their question had combined the destruction of Jerusalem, to which Jesus had referred, with His “coming and of the end of the age.”

Jesus, in His great mercy, did not break down His answer and put labels on which parts pertained to the destruction of Jerusalem, or His future coming. That was for two reasons. First, it would have been discouraging to the believers of the early centuries to be aware that time was going to be extended for another two thousand years! Secondly, He ingeniously combined His answer because the signs and conditions leading up to the two events, the destruction of Jerusalem and His coming, are similar in many ways and share points in common. Looking back from our perspective, we can see the wisdom of His answer. We can see the overlapping of those parts that shine more particularly on the fate of Jerusalem, and those parts that illuminate His coming.

What about those monolithic foundation stones that Jesus said wouldn't remain one on another? During the destruction of Jerusalem the fires raged, and precious gold which had garnished the temple melted and found its way between the cracks of the foundation stones. Roman soldiers, eager to obtain the prized booty, spared no effort to pry apart and dislodge the stones to get the gold. Christ's prophecy was fulfilled to the letter!

Here's a simple outline of His answer to their question. Basically, verses 4 through 20 speak **primarily to those signs and conditions relating to the destruction of Jerusalem** (with the possible exception of verse 14). Of course, they also have much to say about His Second Coming.

Verses 21 and 22 highlight the middle ages, when for over a millennium persecution reigned and millions of Christians sealed their testimony with their blood.

Verses 23-44 speak primarily to signs and conditions relating to His coming at the "end of the age." In only a few short verses, Christ covers the events of two thousand years!

What can we learn from that part of His answer that focused on the destruction of Jerusalem? First, He warned that many false christs would come and deceive many. "For many will come in My name saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many." Matthew 24:5. We know that was true. In the book of Acts we're told that the apostles were put on trial, and had to appear before the Sanhedrin. The wise Gamaliel arose and said, "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed." Acts 5:36-37.

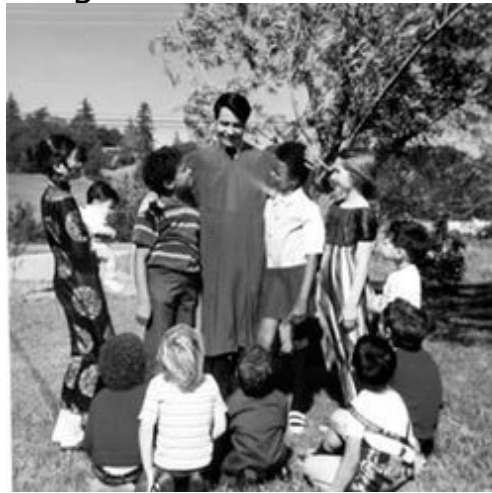
No doubt there were others back then who "claimed to be somebody" and garnered a following. Why was this? Satan always seeks to mislead by multiplying the choices. He uses "division" to separate believers and "multiplication" to confuse onlookers. He used that tactic in Egypt when the magicians seemed to be able to replicate the miracles given through Moses. To a casual observer, Jesus Christ might have appeared as just another messiah figure and they would have rejected Him on that basis. Someone might have said, "With so many claiming to be the 'one,' how could you know which one is right?" Satan hasn't given up on that tactic, by the way!

Jerusalem was filled by the claims of those who pretended to be the "one" of prophecy. The historian Josephus mentions a "great number of false prophets" who deceived the people into believing God would deliver the city. The very day that the temple was set on fire, a "prophet" instructed the people to get into it, where they would "receive miraculous signs of their deliverance." Six thousand obeyed his command, and every one of them

perished in the conflagration. (Josephus, Wars Of The Jews, VI, 5, 2.) Before Jerusalem fell to the Romans, Christ's words had been fulfilled.

What about the last days? Does Jesus' warning have application to our time as well? Without question! Think back over the past few years and see how many claimants have arisen. Some of these names might be familiar, some not so familiar.

There was Jim Jones, a "messiah" who charmed a large crowd into committing suicide.



Does the name Vernon Wayne Howell ring a bell? In 1959 Vernon Wayne Howell was born in Houston, Texas to a 15-year old single mother. A dyslexic, he dropped out of high school. But he enjoyed the Bible and by the age of twelve had even memorized large sections of it. In 1981 he traveled to Waco, Texas where he joined a group of Branch Davidians, of which he became leader in 1990. Unfortunately, the tragic confrontation in Waco between the United States agency of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the Davidians has become all too publicized. By this time he was not known as *Vernon* Howell. He had changed his name to David, because he believed he was the head of the Biblical house of David, and *Koresh*, because that is the modern spelling of the name Cyrus, in whose messianic footsteps he aspired to follow.



Sun Myung Moon founded the Unification church in 1954. He has said that he is the Second Coming of Christ, the Savior, the "returning Lord" and the "True Parent." He teaches that everyone should be like Jesus and like himself and that as such he "appears in the world as the substantial body of God Himself."



Someone known as Maitreya, who prefers to be referred to as the "World Teacher," is expected to have a "Day of Revealing" anytime now. He claims to be the embodiment of all the expectations of world religions. He is the Kalki avatar, or Krishna of the Hindus, the Imam Mahdi of Shia Muslims, Saoshyant of Zoroastrians, the Maitreya ("The Buddha of the Future") for Buddhists, the Messiah of the Jews and Jesus Christ of Christians. He teaches that in the literature of these religions there are prophecies of a future great teacher, and that he is the one expected teacher.



**Maitreya as He appeared  
in Nairobi, 1988**

Jose Luis de Jesus Miranda, a former heroin addict who has "666" tattooed on his arm, is over a global movement that accepts that he is God, that he is the second coming of Jesus Christ. Now located in south Florida, he teaches his "gospel" which consists of the "freedom to indulge." His believers are instructed that they are God's chosen people and predestined for salvation, no matter what they do on earth. According to his doctrine, there is no sin, no devil and no hell. Prayer is a waste of time and the Ten Commandments are irrelevant.

He calls his church "Creciendo en Gracia," or "Growing in Grace" Ministry, which operates out of a warehouse in Miami. He claims to have adherents in 20 countries. People give him their entire savings, cars, businesses, estates, including a million-dollar home in a gated community. His claims are shocking. He considers himself superior to Jesus. "I am greater than him...I teach better than him....I won't die. Even if you tried to kill me! I will be president of the biggest government that this earth has experienced. I'm going to change the whole world. The prophets, they spoke about me. It took me time to learn that, but I am what they were expecting, what they have been expecting for 2,000 years," de Jesus says.

He goes on. "The antichrist is not the devil," de Jesus states. "He's the being who replaces Jesus on earth. Antichrist is the best person in the world. Antichrist means don't put your eyes on Jesus because Jesus of Nazareth wasn't a Christian. Antichrist means do not put your eyes on Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Put it on Jesus after the cross." De Jesus says that means him.



Have you heard of Jesus of Siberia? Sergei Torop was a traffic cop in the small Russian town of Minusinsk until 1989, when he announced that he was the son of God. Now he commands a following of thousands and rules over a large swath of the Siberian Mountains. Thousands of pilgrims have converged on the hamlet of Petropavlovka, deep in the Siberian tundra, to hear the annual sermon by a 41-year-old former traffic policeman whom they believe to be Jesus.

Dressed in flowing red velvet robes and sporting long dark hair, Vissarion, his new name, has appeared before his growing band of followers every year on the anniversary of his revelation in 1989 that he was Christ returned.

"It's all very complicated," he starts quietly. "But to keep things simple, yes, I am Jesus Christ. That which was promised must come to pass. And it was promised in Israel 2,000 years ago that I would return, that I would come back to finish what was started. I am not God. And it is a mistake to see Jesus as God. But I am the living word of God the Father. Everything that God wants to say, he says through me."

"He radiates incredible love," sighs Hermann, 57, a Bavarian engineer who is now selling his home in Germany to join the self-proclaimed messiah. Denis, a 21-year-old Russian émigré arrived from Brisbane to see if Vissarion really was the answer to his questions. "No doubt about it, mate," he affirms. "Definitely the Son of God."

For the Church of the Last Testament, it is now year 47 of the new era, which the believers date from Vissarion's birth in 1961. Christmas has been abolished and replaced by a feast day on January 14, the Teacher's birthday. The biggest holiday of the year falls on August 18, the anniversary of Vissarion's first sermon in 1991, when the "saviour" descended from the mountain on horseback to join thousands of revelers cavorting in the river running by the hamlet of Petropavlovka.



Have the words of Jesus come true? Were there false christs in the days that preceded the destruction of Jerusalem? Certainly! Are there false christs today roaming the planet? Absolutely!

The disciples asked for "a sign," and Jesus gave them one. But He didn't stop there. He went on to relate many more things that would happen before Jerusalem's tragic destruction. "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." Matthew 24:6-8.

Remember, these relate primarily to the sack of Jerusalem, but apply also to the time before Jesus' return. These signs were literally fulfilled before Jerusalem's fall. In Acts 11:28 a severe famine that struck Judea is mentioned. Major earthquakes during that period include ones centered in Crete in A.D. 46, Rome in A.D. 51, Phrygia in A.D. 60 (that affected the cities of Philadelphia

and Laodicea, which we spoke of a few weeks ago) and the worst in Caesarea in A.D. 63. There were also horrific storms and hurricanes in the year A. D. 65 reported by the historian Tacitus.

The historian Josephus, who lived at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, records numerous signs that occurred just before its destruction.

“Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend nor give credit to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation, but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year. Thus also before the Jews' rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month Xanthicus, [Nisan,] and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day time; which lasted for half an hour. Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner [court of the] temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night.

“Besides these, a few days after that feast, on the one and twentieth day of the month Artemisius, [Jyar,] a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared: I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities.

“Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the temple,] as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence." But, what is still more terrible, there was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a plebeian and a husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast whereon it is our custom for every one to make tabernacles to God in the temple, began on a sudden to cry aloud, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!" This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city.

“But these men interpreted some of these signals according to their own pleasure, and some of them they utterly despised, until their madness was demonstrated, both by the taking of their city and their own destruction.” Josephus, Wars Of The Jews, VI, 5.4. (underlining added)

Do I need to remind you of famines, pestilences and earthquakes taking place today? Just last Monday, six tornadoes touched down in Virginia.

The phrase “beginning of sorrows” is significant. The specific type of sorrow this is referring to is what a woman endures when delivering her child. This is a comparison with the event to a birthing experience. Ever since sin entered birth pangs were declared to be the lot of the “woman.” The Scripture specifically illustrates the experience of “deliverance” with the giving of birth. Don’t we still call the section of the hospital where births occur “Labor and *Delivery*”? “Travail before deliverance,” the experience of the church (the “woman”) could be the heading of an impressive lists of Bible texts.

Isaiah 13:8 "And they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth."

Jeremiah 30:6, 7 "Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it."

Micah 4:9, 10 "For pangs have seized you like a woman in labor. Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in birth pangs. For now you shall go forth from the city, you shall dwell in the field, and you shall go even to Babylon. There you shall be delivered; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies."

There would be persecutions. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another." Matthew 24:9, 10. Before the fall of Jerusalem, these words came to pass. Many were the followers of Jesus who suffered trial and martyrdom.

Stephan was the first to fall, stoned in A.D. 34.

James (the "Greater") was the first of the 12 disciples to die, being beheaded in A.D. 44.

Andrew was crucified in Greece on an "x" shaped cross by order of the Roman Governor Aegeas during the reign of Nero in A.D. 60.

Barnabas was martyred in Salamis, Cyprus, the Island of his birth in A. D. 61.

According to traditional accounts, Bartholomew was flayed alive and crucified upside down in Albanopolis, Armenia, as a punishment for having converted the King of Armenia to the Christian faith.

In A.D. 62, James the Lesser, the son of Alphaeus, was thrown off a pinnacle of the temple, and then beaten with clubs as he prayed for his persecutors.

Paul was beheaded in A.D. 64.

Peter, at his request, was crucified upside down in A. D. 64.

Will there be persecutions and trials before the day of Jesus' return? Bank on it! In fact, it's happening right now. But these things will increase as we get nearer to the end, when there bursts forth the "time of trouble such as never was." Daniel 12:1. Right now, the Bible pictures angels "holding back the winds," which represent the final storms of trial, until God's people are ready. Don't expect that the devil is going to give up easy. There will be "birth pangs" before "deliverance." If you're living for the things of this life, the decision to follow Jesus will be very difficult. You'll be tempted to "look back" like Lot's wife.

Jesus said, "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." Matthew 24:14. The Good News of Jesus spread quickly during the first century. The admonition of Christ to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the farthest places of the earth was fulfilled in the early decades after His death. But the fullest application of this promise belongs to the Second Advent. Even now we are seeing the light of the gospel penetrate into the far reaches of the globe. Through the media of internet, satellite television, cell phones as well as personal evangelism, the Gospel is being spread. The light will shine even brighter as we approach the end.

I want to return now to verse three and highlight the one word that stands out to me as being the most important. "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?'" The one word that jumps out at me is the adverb "privately." Think of the significance of that word in this narrative! What we read in Matthew 24 was not given to the crowds on the seashore. This information was for those who sought Him out in seclusion. In the end, it doesn't matter if we have all the facts of His coming, if we don't have a relationship with Him!

The world seeks a “sign” in the sense of the spectacular. The magazine racks beside the grocery checkout feature stunning predictions of apocalyptic phenomena. But rarely would you find an article stressing the importance of quiet time with Jesus! And yet, that’s exactly what we need the most. If you had to choose, far better to have the “private time with Christ” than the most complete catalogue of information on the last days. However, we don’t have to choose. The truth is that Jesus will reveal to His own (and not the crowds) those things that He knows are important for us to know.

He’s coming soon! May God help us to be ready!