

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 1 0 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The familiar and often used phrase "the signs of the times" came to mankind from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. These words, when spoken by Him, had nothing to do with His second coming. Nevertheless, many generations of the "prophets of doom" have used these words to bolster their own wild predictions concerning the future of mankind and the soon anticipated coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the phrase "the signs of the times" has been forced into an unholy alliance with a thousand-and-one sensational events, all of which are declared to be the most positive signs of the imminent return of Christ. When this phrase is restored to its context, the honest student will readily admit that these words had no such meaning when first spoken by our Lord.

Consider the circumstances that brought forth these words. The Pharisees and Sadducees were enemies, but they found common ground in their rejection of Jesus as being the Christ. Together they came to Him and asked that He show them a sign from heaven. In answer He spoke of their custom of looking at the Palestinian sky, reading the signs there, then predicting the weather. He then denounced them as hypocrites since they could not discern "**the signs of the times.**" (See Matthew 16:1 - 3.)

This makes it evident that our Lord was not speaking of any signs that would precede and point to His second coming. The reality of His first coming and presence upon the earth was the fact that was before them. His second coming was not yet in the picture. So, it would have been most unfair for the Lord to have publicly branded these men as hypocrites because they could not discern signs that pointed to His return to the earth. There could have been no such signs at that time. How absurd it would have been for the

Pharisees, or even His faithful disciples, to have looked upon certain strange events and accepted them as signs of His second coming. Furthermore, the 1900 years of history that have passed since these words were spoken reveal how mistaken anyone would have been, had they judged anything that transpired in that day to have been a sign of His second advent.

When we face the facts, there can be no other conclusion -- the phrase "the signs of the times," as it came from the lips of the Lord Jesus and as it now comes to us from the Bible, has no connection with the second coming of Christ.

In the past 150 years, many who professed to be preachers of the Bible's prophetic message have practiced a great deception upon themselves and upon their hearers by taking the unusual, spectacular, and sensational events that are always transpiring, and presenting them, after much embellishment, as positive signs of the imminency of the second coming. The passage of time has proven that they were completely wrong, never right, always mistaken. Others, who have been as consistently wrong, have been the date-setters, who, by a hundred different methods of calculation, have set the date for the return of Christ. The history of the past has demonstrated they were always wrong, and future events will continue to show their errors. And this is and will continue to be just as true of those who have presented some outstanding event as a sign that the coming of Christ is imminent. I have been a close personal observer of this for 60 years, since 1916 when I first heard of the second coming; yet, in spite of the thousands of things that have been presented as the most positive signs, the Lord has not yet come. Nevertheless, there is still a good market for each new book of which claims are made that a new set of signs are presented that indicate the Lord is coming soon.

Had the Pharisees discerned "the signs of the times," they would have known that they were living in the days of the Son of God upon the earth. The appearance upon the earth of God's Anointed One, the Christ, had long been prophesied. Certain definite signs were to give witness to the reality of His presence, and these were manifest in that day. The man Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees and a ruler, spoke for all his group when, after considering these signs, he declared: "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with Him" (John 3:2).

The miracles performed by our Lord were the signs of those times - signs that spoke eloquently and proclaimed the presence of the Son of God upon the earth; but the Pharisees had failed to listen to their message. These signs did not point to some future event. They spoke of a then present reality.

Those who today profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should earnestly seek to avoid the mistake made by the Pharisees. They could not discern the signs of their times. We will make the same mistake if we fail to discern the signs of our times. There are signs of the times in which we live, signs which we need to discern and heed, signs that reveal to us the character of the time in which we live.

We do not live in the days of the Son of God upon the earth, and the signs that gave witness to that fact and truth are not seen today. They would be out of 'place and give false witness if they were a common occurrence. Neither do we live in that unique and strange period of thirty-three years of which the book of Acts is the history. In that time God always confirmed His Word with signs following (Mark 16:20, Heb. 2:4). In the Acts period, the kingdom of God was then in the blade and ear stage, like growing grain (see Issue No. **SB048**); and all the signs of that time gave witness to this. We are living in a time and under a condition when all of God's kingdom purposes have been suspended. We are living under a distinct and new dispensation or administration. This is the administration or dispensation of the grace of God, and there are signs on every hand that give witness to this fact. If we close our eyes to these, we will make the same mistake as did the Pharisees.

An administration or dispensation is a method of dealing. Neither word has to do with a period of time, even though they take place in a period of time. But what doesn't? God's administrations are God's methods of dealing with mankind or with some portion of mankind which He has marked out, such as Israel (Amos 3:2). God's present administration, His present method of dealing, is entirely gracious. It makes no difference whether one is a saint or a sinner, God is dealing with Him only in grace (see Issue No. **SB057**).

This fact is known from a divine secret revealed to Paul, which was then made known by him for those for whom it was intended, the nations (Eph. 3:1,2). Today, if God cannot act in grace, then He will not act at all. This is witnessed to by over 1900 years of human history, by every fact of human life and experience, and by the signs that abound on every hand.

Let the reader consider his own life as an example. Has God rewarded you according to your sins? Has God dealt with you according to your iniquities? Has each sin and transgression of yours brought their just recompense of reward? Has God dealt with you in strict justice? What has been God's method of dealing with you?

To these questions there can be only one answer. You have not been dealt with according to your sins. You have not been dealt with in strict justice. You have been dealt with in grace - in that love and favor that God shows to the undeserving. You may have thought at times that God was punishing you; but, if *so*, you were mistaken. You may have thought you were experiencing a display of divine wrath, but you were wrong. God has not punished you, and His wrath has not been displayed. To think so, or to make such statements, is to slander the grace that He is continually showing. God has, for the present, ignored your sins in order that He might display His grace toward you. Every day of your life gives witness to this. These are the signs of our times. It is tragic that so many fail to discern this.

We must not be so childish as to think that a sign must be some stupendous miracle. Great progress will have been made when one has learned with Elijah that God may not be in the wind; He may not be in the earthquake; and He may not be in the fire; but He may be in the still small voice (1 Kgs.19:11, 12). But still greater progress will be made when we realize that God can speak by means of absolute silence. If silence is golden and if silence can be eloquent, then we are today face-to-face with a golden eloquence to which every ear should be in tune.

If we read the signs that exist on every hand today, we will know that God's present method of dealing is worked in secret. He operates in secret, and this has caused many to conclude that He is not acting at all, and some to suggest that He is dead. To act in secret is always proper when one is acting in grace, but all acts of justice must be evident and in the open. You have every right to secretly slip a twenty-dollar note under the door of your needy neighbor, but you have no right to take twenty dollars from him unless you publicly invoke the due processes of the law. By acting only in grace and always acting in secret, God is steadily and fully accomplishing His present purpose to write into the history of His long dealings with mankind a complete record of the grace that is inherent in His character (see Issue No. **SB064**). Every sign today tells us we are living in a time of God's silence and under an administration of grace. And were it not for the truth

that God gave in His final revelations through Paul, this would be one of the greatest mysteries of our existence.

On every hand, there are voices that make the claim that God is speaking to and through them. Yet, in all the nineteen centuries since God became silent, not one thing has come forth from anyone that has added one iota to man's knowledge of God. Men may imagine that God is speaking, but the facts of life demonstrate that He is silent. We may not like it this way; and in their dissatisfaction, men may implore God to break His silence. But God will not do this until His present purpose in His present silence is complete. If God should speak, then He must back up His word with acts of justice; and this would end His long display of grace.

The Word of God which we possess, especially that truth contained in God's final revelation to the Apostle Paul, should lead us to see that we are living in a time when God's method of dealing is entirely gracious, when every act of His is one of love and favor to the undeserving, a time when He maintains a strict silence, and a time when He operates in secret. The Bible tells us this, and every fact and experience of our lives give witness to it. These are our signs. They tell us of the times in which we live. Let us discern the signs of our times.

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