

An update on the Signs of the End

Jesus tells us several times to watch out for the Signs of the End and, obviously, we should obey him. Yes, we must avoid jumping to naïve conclusions. But it is equally wrong not to be looking for the Signs of the End. Jesus warns us not to be caught out, unprepared for his Coming.

The early (repeating) signs he referred to were false messiahs (Matt 24:4-5), wars famines, earthquakes (Matt 24:6-7), pestilences (Lk 21:11). He also referred to signs nearer his coming, namely worldwide persecution (Matt 24:9), people turning away from the faith (Matt 24:10), false prophets (Matt 24:11), the gospel being preached to all nations (Mk 13:10), Jerusalem being restored to Jewish control (Lk 21:24). The final sign is “the abomination of desolation.” I seek to keep watch and noted the following facts.

EARLY AND ONGOING SIGNS (which one would expect to increase nearer to the Second Coming)

False Messiahs (Mt 24:4-5)

Here are 23 false messiahs from the last 100 years, including 9 who are still alive in 2023.

False Messiahs still alive in 2023:

1. Laszlo Toth (born 1938).
2. Wayne Bent (born 1941), of the Lord Our Righteousness.
3. Jung Myung-seok (born 1945), founded the Providence Church in South Korea, who considers himself the Second Coming of Christ, but not Jesus himself.
4. Claude Vorilhon (born 1946), from France, who founded the Rael Movement who became Messiah in 1972.
5. Inri Cristo (born 1948) from Brazil
6. Apollo Quiboloy (born 1950), from the Philippines, who founded the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and claims to be the "Appointed Son of God".
7. Brian David Mitchell (born 1953) from Salt Lake City, Utah.
8. Maria Devi Christos (born 1960), leader of the Great White Brotherhood.
9. Alan John Miller (born 1962), from Australia, founder of Divine Truth.

War (Mt 24:6-7; Rev 6:1-4)

The danger of war is increasing.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, chief of UK defence staff, said in December 2022 that the world is going through an “extraordinarily dangerous time” as war rages in Europe and confrontations escalate between the West and China, North Korea and Iran. Radakin added that Iran has a rapidly developing nuclear programme and then there is “nuclear North Korea ...with over 60 ballistic missile launches this year...” China has substantially increased its nuclear arsenal and strengthened its armed forces.

The world is facing the highest number of violent conflicts since the Second World War (when 80 million were killed - 17 million in World War 1) and 2 billion people — a quarter of humanity — live in places affected by such conflict.

Researchers from the Institute for Economics and Peace based in Sydney, Australia, calculated that in 2022 nearly a quarter of a million people died in wars and armed conflicts. (This represents the highest number since 1994, the year of the Rwandan Genocide when well over half a million people were killed). The war in Ukraine has contributed towards this figure, with conflict also worsening in Myanmar and Middle Belt Nigeria - areas of intense anti-Christian violence. Now there is the Israel-Gaza war.

A UN paper published in 2020 entitled “A New Era of Conflict and Violence” stated “Today, we are witnessing the unravelling of the international arms control architecture and a gradual backtracking on established arms control agreements, which have supported global stability, restraint, and transparency. The continued existence of nuclear weapons poses an ever-greater threat to the survival of humanity. ... relations between nuclear-armed states are fraying, and divisions over the pace and scale of disarmament are growing.”

In December 2022, Henry Kissinger wrote “Autonomous weapons already exist, capable of defining, assessing and targeting their own perceived threats and thus in a position to start their own war. ...How can leaders exercise control when computers prescribe strategic instructions on a scale and in a manner that inherently limits and threatens human input?”

Famine (Mt 24:7)

Famine is increasing extensively

In 2023, the World Food Programme said its statistics show more than double the number of people facing severe food shortage than in 2020. This constitutes a staggering rise of 200 million people.

On a worldwide level, up to 783 million people are suffering from hunger and food shortages, according to a July 2023 UN report, with the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean the worst-affected. Around 2.4 billion people - almost a third of the world's population – are experiencing food insecurity. It points out that “Conflict is still the biggest driver of hunger, with 70 percent of the world's hungry people living in areas afflicted by war.” It also adds “Climate shocks destroy lives, crops and livelihoods, and undermine people’s ability to feed themselves.”

Earthquakes (Mt 24:7; Rev 6:12) and Fearful Events (Lk 21:11; Rev 6:7-8)

Climate change will increase earthquakes and volcanoes

The number of earthquakes has not risen, but since the world population has increased and spread dramatically, obviously more people will die. In the last two years, approx. 67,000 people died in 7 earthquakes, of which, approx. 59,500 died in the Turkey/Syrian quake.

Climate change will affect earthquakes. When glaciers melt, the water can seep into cracks in the Earth's crust, causing them to widen and weaken. This can lead to earthquakes, especially in areas that are already seismically active. Climate change will also affect volcanoes, e.g. because of melting glaciers (because glaciers and ice caps restrict the flow of magma).

Climate-related disasters are on the rise across the globe. Floods, hurricanes, cyclones, earthquakes, etc., are affecting communities worldwide in unprecedented numbers. A 2022 Ecological Threat Register report shows that the world is now experiencing *ten times the number of climate-related disasters per year than in 1960*.

Pestilence

In 2012 the United Nations predicted that the world population will reach 9.6 billion people by mid-century, and 11 billion by 2100. Dr. Peter Daszak, a disease ecologist, said "There's a strong correlation between the risk of pandemic and human population density. We've done the math and we've proved it." The study found that more than 300 new infectious diseases emerged between 1940 and 2004. Daszak commented “You can predict very confidently as each year moves forward, we're going to see more and more diseases emerge.”

Abraham Haileamlak, Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health, wrote “Despite huge scientific and medical advances, the potential for diseases to spread is actually increasing, and the risk of outbreaks escalating into epidemics or pandemics. Several factors do play a role in the increase in frequency and coverage of pandemics. A huge increase in globalization and connectivity has meant that disease agents can spread from one side of the world to another within a few hours. Other major factors contributing to the increased occurrence of pandemics are: urbanisation, increased human-animal contact and climate change (which affects the spread of disease in a number of ways, such as by altering the natural range of disease carrying insects, like mosquitoes.” Professor Peter Horby, a scientific adviser to the UK government, said rising global connectivity was “increasing the odds” of future outbreaks.

In May 2023 Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of World Health Organisation, told its annual health assembly in Geneva that it was time to advance negotiations on preventing the next pandemic. He added that governments need to prepare for a disease even deadlier than Covid-19, which the WHO estimates led to at least 3 million deaths. However, we have to remember that the flu epidemic after World War 1 resulted in probably more than

20 million deaths and the Black Death in the Middle Ages resulted in 75-200 million deaths. But no vaccines or treatment were available.

Cosmic disturbance (Lk 21:11, 25; Acts 2:19)

In November 2022, Astrophysicist, Ethan Siegel pointed out that the overwhelming majority of asteroids, including near-Earth asteroids, have yet to be found and characterized. He added that this may represent the greatest threat to Earth.

SIGNS HERALDING THE SECOND COMING

Worldwide Persecution (Mt 24:9; Rev 2:10; 6:9-11)

Persecution of Christians is increasing. In November 2022 a debate on “Christian persecution - Freedom of religion or belief” was held by the UK Parliament Backbench Business Committee. The following statements were published in the report:

“In 2022... at least 360 million Christians experienced ‘high levels of persecution and discrimination.’ This was 20 million higher than 2021. The group also estimated that the number of Christians killed for their faith rose to 5,898 in 2022, up from 4,761 in 2021. Persecution included instances of serious intimidation, disinformation, stereotyping, legal threats, and attacks on places of worship.”

The Pew Research Centre reported that the number of countries in which Christians had been harassed rose every year bar one from 2013 to 2019, increasing from 102 to 153 (77% of the 198 analysed countries). The Middle East-North Africa region had the highest share of countries in which Christians were harassed (19 of 20), followed by the Asia-Pacific.”

Secularism & Compromise (Mt 24:12) esp. lukewarmness & sexual sin (Rev 2:4, 14-16, 20; 3:1, 15-17)

I am looking at the trend in the UK. In 2022 a survey by Kings’ College, London found that only 49% of the British population believe in God, compared with 75% in 1981. Western Europe is less religious than Eastern Europe. Only China (17%), Sweden (35%), Japan (39%), South Korea (40%) and Norway (46%) have less people saying they believe in God.

Research by the Co-op in 2019 found that only 10% of British people want a religious funeral. The Church of England experienced a 50% decline in the number of funerals between 1999 and 2019. The number of regular Sunday worshippers in the Church of England fell from 925,000 in 2016 to 510,000 in 2021. The number of Methodist worshippers fell by nearly 30,000 in the last 3 years, to just over 130,000. 100 chapels closed in 2021-2022.

A survey by Colin Bloom, an Independent Faith Engagement Adviser, found that some 68% of British Christians think that freedom of religion is under threat in the UK. The report said “Some members of both Christian and minority religions felt they were at risk of being marginalised, de-platformed, or even losing their jobs for practising their faiths or beliefs.”

In 2017, Tim Farron was effectively driven out as leader of the Liberal Democrats for being an evangelical Christian. Kate Forbes, who came a close second to being the Scottish Nationalist Party’s leader, was attacked for being an active member of the Free Church of Scotland which opposed the gender recognition reform bill. Similarly, David Campanale was deselected by Liberal Democrats in Sutton and Cheam as their parliamentary candidate because he was a practising Christian.

False Teachers (Mt 24:11; Rev 2:2)

The NT clearly teaches we should submit to God, i.e. to his Word. However, we now live in a “Me First,” “My Rights” age, which is totally contradictory to the NT teaching. These attitudes in society have been embraced by many churches in the West in various ways including:

- Approval of homosexual practice which is unbiblical

- Blessing homosexual marriage which is unbiblical
- Choice of gender which is unbiblical
- Universalism and interfaith compromise. Universalism is the belief that we will all get to heaven in the end whatever our beliefs (or behaviour). Interfaith compromise undermines the clear teaching of Jesus that he is the only way of salvation. It is now rife in the church.

False Prophets (Mt 24:11, 24)

There are numerous false prophets in the USA and elsewhere, gathering large followings, including through the media.

Worldwide Evangelism (Mt 24:14)

One Christian research group (Lifeway Research) has stated that “Global Christianity is advancing in ways previous generations could have only imagined.” They estimate that, in 1900, over half the world was unevangelised, but, by 2023, that had fallen to just over a quarter of the world.

The Pew Research Centre estimates there are 2.38 billion Christians, which is nearly one third of the world population of about 8 billion. There were some 600 million in 1910, but the world population was 1.8 billion. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity estimates there will be around 3.3 billion, out of a world population of 9.3 billion in 2050. However, some of these people will be nominal Christians.

The World Christian Encyclopedia, estimates that some 2.7 million people convert to Christianity from another religion every year. Evangelicals (especially Charismatics) and Pentecostals are the fastest growing groups. projected to reach 1 billion before 2050.

The Pew Research Centre say that about two-thirds of all the 158 countries and territories in the world have a Christian majority. 1.3 billion Christians live in the Global South (61%), and about 860 million live in the Global North (39%).

The highest growth is in Asia (1.62% per annum) and Africa (2.76% per annum). In 1900, there were less than 10 million Christians in Africa. Now 718 million live there. The Christian population in Africa is expected to reach 1 billion before 2050.

Sadly, the Middle East has the lowest concentration of Christians (about 4% of the population) and the smallest number of Christians (about 13 million) of any major geographic region.

Baylor University Institute for Studies of Religion estimates that 10.2 million Muslims have converted to Christianity. The study says highest number of converts are from Indonesia (6,500,000), Nigeria (600,000), Iran (500,000), the United States (450,000), Ethiopia (400,000) and Algeria (380,000).

Modern media facilitate world evangelism. For example, Global Media Outreach, describing itself as a family of online evangelistic ministries, claim that about 400,000 people per day visit one of their 102 websites and that huge numbers say they have decided to receive Christ. Also, most people in the world have access to a smart phone. Estimates vary but the most prominent say that it is around 85% of the world population, approximately 7 billion people. This means they have access to evangelistic sites, whether for written or spoken material.

However, there are approx. 3,000 ethnic people groups that are unreached, have no church in their area, and few, if any, known believers. Operation World states "The sobering fact is that, even with all this activity, probably 24-27% of the world's population have not had the Good News presented to them in a way they could appreciate and meaningfully respond to."

“The Abomination of Desolation” (Mt 25:15)

In Revelation 13 we read about world government and the rise of “the Beast” who controls the world economy and eventually demands worship.

Trends towards world government are growing. Global cooperation can bring many benefits and is increasingly important because of the problems we are facing. But we must remember that world government is likely to bring dictatorship and oppression, which relates to prophecies in the NT.

The Antichrist will need to use surveillance, which is spreading rapidly through use of fixed cameras, and Artificial Intelligence. It is only recently that the huge dangers (as well as benefits) posed by AI are being recognised and addressed. (The first international conference on AI was held in the UK in 2023). It is not difficult to see how this could become a tool in the hands of the Antichrist.

CONCLUSION

It seems clear that the signs Jesus told us to watch out for are increasing in intensity and regularity. This includes the later signs: worldwide persecution, secularism and compromise, false teachers and prophets, trends that can facilitate the emergence of the “abomination of desolation” and worldwide evangelism. Then there is the re-establishment of Israel which is a clear later sign (Luke 21:24). The situation is serious and we need to keep watch. Let us remember that Jesus’ return will bring both salvation and judgment. In Mark 13:37 Jesus said: ‘What I say to you I say to everyone: ‘WATCH!’