

Signs of the Times

*"Jesus answered, "When the sun is setting, you say, 'We are going to have fine weather, because the sky is red.' And early in the morning you say, 'It is going to rain, because the sky is red and dark.' You can predict the weather by looking at the sky, **but you cannot interpret the signs concerning these times!**" (Matt. 16:2-3, my emphasis).*

Racial Riots

On TV, in recent days, we were shocked to see scenes of racial riots in the streets of many cities and towns of America; scenes of rioters clashing with the police, vehicles and buildings on fire and shops and businesses being looted! This happening in the so called most civilised country in the world!

In various other countries in the world the racial issue is becoming a serious problem as result of the instreaming of many Arabian and African immigrants.

Also here in South Africa we are aware of tensions that exist between people of different racial groups.

Has the Bible something to say about this conflict ?

When the disciples asked Jesus what the signs of His second coming and the end of the age will be, He answered:

*" You are going to hear of wars and rumours of wars. See to it that you are not alarmed. These things must take place, but the end hasn't come yet, because **nation will rise up in arms against nation**, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. But all these things are only the beginning of the birth pains." (Matt. 24:4-8, ISV, my emphasis).*

In the ***Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*** the meaning of the Greek word *éthnos*, which, in this passage is translated as "nation," is given as:

"...a race, as of the same habit, i.e. a tribe..."

Spiros Zodhiates, in ***The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament*** gives the meaning of the word *éthnos*, as

"...a people, **race**, belonging and living together"

In the ***Longman Contemporary English Dictionary*** the meaning of the English word *ethnic*, which is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, is given as "...a **racial**, national or tribal group..." (My emphasis).

Another source explains the word ethnic as:

*“...groups of people who have certain racial, cultural, religious, or other traits in common. The **word** is ...from Greek... ethnos...The concept of **ethnic origin** is an attempt to classify people, **not according to their current nationality, but according to commonalities in their social background**”*

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_origin my emphasis).

With these meanings of the word *ethnos* in mind, it seems that the conflicts referred to in **Matthew 24:7** will not only be between the governments of different countries in the world, but will also be between different races and different ethnical groups.

Signs of the Times or Times of the Signs?

When Jesus mentioned the different signs of the end times that we see happening in the world today, He made it clear that *“all these things are only the beginning of the birth pains”* (**Matt. 24:8**).

Any woman who has given natural birth will explain to you that the important sign to look at in child birth, is not only to take notice of the birth pangs, but also to take note of the frequency in which they happen. Things like earthquakes, storms, sicknesses, epidemics and famines have always been present in the world, but it is noticeable that in more modern times the frequency of these things have increased.

The time described as the beginning of birth pains is also predicted by what Paul wrote:

“You must realize, however, that in the last days difficult times will come” (**2 Tim. 3:1-5**).

The Bible describes an end time world that will be characterised by:

- false prophets (**1 Joh.4:1, 2 Tim.4:3, Matt.24:4**)
- moral decay (**Luk. 17:26-27** “...like in the days of Noah...” – Sodom en Gomorra
- lawlessness (**2 Tim.3:1-4**)
- war (**Matt. 24:7-8**)
- racial and ethnic tensions (**Matt. 24:7-8**)
- anxiety, perplexity and bewilderment amongst the people of the world (**Luk. 21:25**)
- famine (**Luk.21:11**)
- plagues and pestilence (**Luk. 21:11**)
- earthquakes (**Matt. 24:7-8**)
- apostasy and departure from Biblical truth (**Luk.18:8, 1 Tim. 4:1**)
- love and faith will grow cold as result of the increase in the spread of evil (**Luk.18:8, Mat 24:12**)
- wide appeals for false peace (**1 Thess. 5:3**)

Israel as a sign

An important sign of end times is to take note of what is happening in Israel. For more than two thousand years the Jews had no country of their own that they could call their fatherland, then when Israel was declared as a Jewish state in 1948, Jews from across the world migrated there. Israel is mentioned in many passages in the Bible in connection with end time events.

Jesus for example knew what would happen to the Jews, because He predicted that Jerusalem would be

“trodden down by nations, until the times of the nations are fulfilled” (Luk. 21:24).

The return of the Jews to their native land in 1948 was also predicted by various prophets in the Old Testament:

“He will raise a banner for the nations and will assemble the dispersed of Israel; he will gather the scattered people of Judah from the corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:12).

“As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up from the land of the north and from all the lands to which the LORD had banished them. I'll bring them back to their land, which I gave to their ancestors” (Jer. 16:15).

Against the background of all these observable signs in the world today, the warning of Jesus in Matthew 24:42-44 should be taken seriously:

“So then, you also must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him” (Matt. 24:42-44).

Conclusion

In spite of political chaos, wars, riots, famines, earthquakes and pandemics, **for those who are in Christ Jesus**, God's promise stands:

“In all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:37-39).

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