

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

1. FOR what did Christ reprove the Pharisees and Sadducees?

“O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but *can ye not discern the signs of the times?*” **Matthew 16:3.**

2. What sign had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah by which Christ, at His first advent, might be known as the Messiah?

“Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, *a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*” **Isaiah 7:4.** For fulfillment, see **Matthew 1:22, 23.**

3. Where had the prophet said Christ should be born?

“But thou, *Bethlehem Ephratah,* though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel.” **Micah 5:2.** For fulfillment, see **Matthew 2:1.**

4. What prophet had foretold Christ’s ride into Jerusalem?

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; *lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*” **Zechariah 9:9.** For fulfillment, see **Matthew 21:4, 5.**

5. What question did the disciples ask Christ concerning His second coming?

“And as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and *what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?*” **Matthew 24:3.**

6. How, according to Luke, did Christ answer this question?

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the *stars;* and upon the earth *distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear,* and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” **Luke 21:25 26.**

7. What, according to Matthew’s account, did Christ say were to be the signs in the sun, moon, and stars?

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be *darkened*, and the moon shall *not give her light*, and the stars shall *fall from heaven*.” **Matthew 24:29**.

8. In what language had some of the Old Testament prophets already foretold these signs?

“And *I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth*, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. *The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood*, before the great and the terrible day of the lord come.” **Joel 2:30, 31**. “*The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining*.” **Joel 3:15**. “*For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine*.” **Isaiah 13:10**. “*I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in a clear day*.” **Amos 8:9**.

9. When were the sun and moon darkened?

May 19, 1780.

NOTES — “The nineteenth of May, 1780, was a remarkably dark day. Candles were lighted in many houses. The birds were silent, and disappeared. The owls retired to roost. It was the general opinion that the day of judgment was at hand. The legislature of Connecticut was in session at Hartford, but being unable to transact business, adjourned.” *President Dwight, in “Historical Collections.”*

“In some places persons could not see to read common print in the open air for several hours together. Birds sang their evening song, disappeared, and became silent; fowls went to roost; cattle sought the barnyard; and candles were lighted in the houses. The obscuration began about ten o’clock in the morning, and continued until the middle of the next night, but with differences of degree and duration in different places. . . . The true causes of this remarkable phenomenon are not known.” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary, edition 1883, page 1604, in article The Dark Day.*”

Herschel, the great astronomer, says: “The dark day in Northern America was one of those wonderful phenomena of

nature which will always be read with interest, but which philosophy is at a loss to explain.”

The darkness was not caused by any eclipse of the sun by the moon, for the moon had fullled only the night before, and consequently was on the opposite side of the earth from the sun.

“The darkness of the following evening was probably as deep and dense as ever had been observed since the Almighty first gave birth to light; it wanted only palpability to render it as extraordinary as that which overspread the land of Egypt in the days of Moses. If every luminous body in the universe had been shrouded in impenetrable shades, or struck out of existence, it was thought the darkness could not have been more complete. A sheet of white paper, held within a few inches of the eyes, was equally invisible with the blackest velvet.” *“Our First Century,” by R. M. Devins, page 94.*

The darkness of the night was as supernatural as that of the previous day, from the fact, as stated by Dr. Adams, that “the moon had fullled the day before.”

10. When was there a remarkable display of falling stars?

Nov. 13, 1833.

NOTES — The celebrated astronomer and meteorologist, Professor Olmsted, of Yale College, says: “Those who were so fortunate as to witness the exhibition of shooting stars on the morning of Nov. 13, 1833, probably saw the greatest display of celestial fireworks that has ever been since the creation of the world, or at least within the annals covered by the pages of history. . . . The extent of the shower of 1833 was such as to cover no inconsiderable part of the earth’s surface, from the middle of the Atlantic on the east to the Pacific on the west; and from the northern coast of South America to undefined regions among the British possessions on the north the exhibition was visible, and everywhere presented nearly the same appearance.

“At Niagara the exhibition was especially brilliant, and probably no spectacle so terribly grand and sublime was ever

before beheld by man as that of the firmament descending in fiery torrents over the dark 1881, article "Meteor."

Upon reading a statement that modern fireworks excel this greatest exhibition of shooting stars, Mr. Clarkson, father of the former editors of the paper from which the following quotation is made, and himself agricultural editor of it, said: "The writer of that sentence did not witness the glorious meteoric shower of November, 1833, when the display was so much superior to any artistic display of fireworks that neither language nor any element in nature can furnish comparisons. The comparison of the sheet-iron thunder of the theaters to the electric display of Providence when the heavens are all on fire, and the earth trembles, would be tolerable. But the awful grandeur of the display on the night of the thirteenth of November, 1833, which made the stoutest heart stand in awe, and the most defiant infidel quake with fear, is never to be compared with the most brilliant fireworks. Those who witnessed the meteoric shower named saw the greatest display that man ever will see until the day that Peter speaks of when the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The agricultural editor of the Register was out alone with a team and load of lumber all night on that never-to-be-forgotten night. And he cannot now consent to hear of human fireworks being superior to that most grand and sublime spectacle ever before or since beheld by man. Patent fireworks are no nearer this wonderful phenomenon than a lightning-bug is equal to the sun." *Iowa State Register, July 12, 1889.*

Frederick A. Douglas, in his book "My Bondage and My Freedom," page 186, says: " I witnessed this gorgeous spectacle, and was struck with awe. The air seemed filled with bright descending messengers from the sky. It was about daybreak when I saw this sublime scene. It was not without the suggestion at that moment that it might be *the harbinger of the coming of the Son of man*; and in my state of mind I was prepared to hail Him as my friend and deliverer. I

had read that the stars shall fall from heaven, and they were now falling.”

A single star appeared to the wise men, and directed them to the Saviour, at His first advent. Myriads of stars have announced the nearness of His second advent. It will be seen that these signs produced the very impression that God evidently intended that they should,— that the day of judgment, Christ’s coming, and the end of the world are near at hand.

11. Have we reached the time when there is “distress of nations, with perplexity”?

Every intelligent person knows that the world is in a state of unrest at the present time, and that men are troubled and perplexed at the outlook of present conditions throughout the civilized world.

NOTES — “Those who study the map of Europe at the present moment, and the condition of things in Europe, must feel that there is hanging over us a war-cloud greater than any that has hung over Europe before. It means when it bursts, and burst it will as surely as the sun will rise tomorrow, . . . a war of extinction, of devastation, between great nations whose populations are armed and trained to fight.” *Lord Wolseley.*

“It is impossible for any one to contemplate the present naval and military arrangements without the gravest forebodings. . . . In fact, we never now have any real peace; we live practically in a state of war.” *Sir John Lubbock.*

“The danger, if the Ottoman Empire fall, would not merely be the danger that would threaten the territories of which that empire consists; it would be the danger that the fire there lit should spread to the other nations, and should involve all that is most powerful and civilized in Europe in a dangerous and calamitous contest.” *Lord Salisbury, in Mansion House Speech, London, Nov. 9, 1895.*

“There can be no division of either of those countries [Turkey or Persia] without setting all the nations of Europe at the throats of each other.” *Washington Post, April 24, 1909.*

This is the most unsettled condition of the world since the crucifixion of Christ. The stability of government is no longer a fact. Change is in the atmosphere. . . . Statesmen are at their wits’ end. Philosophers speculate in vain.” *The Late Bishop Newman.*

12. Are men’s hearts now “failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth”?

Every one familiar with present-day conditions knows that this is the case.

NOTES — “We are marching toward the unknown. Who knows what tomorrow has in store for us? *Signor Crispi, ex-Prime Minister of Italy.*

“In regard to the future I am filled with disquietude when I think how easy it is to fan these international jealousies, and how difficult it seems to allay them.” *Lord Balfour, of England.*

“In this world of ours we seem to be borne down by commercial and spiritual controversy. . . . We grope in the daytime with fear and trembling for the future. Poor, distracted man is tossed over the night to a more distraught tomorrow.” *John Wanamaker, ex-Postmaster-General of the United States.*

“The bonds of society are relaxed; traditional principles are losing their sacredness, and perils hitherto unknown are menacing the life of the social organism.” *Archbishop Ireland.*

These, with forebodings of coming droughts, famines, fires, storms, earthquakes, tidal waves, and pestilences, are filling men’s hearts with fear.

13. What may be said of “the sea and the waves roaring”?

Great tidal waves and storms at sea, with cyclones and tornadoes on land, have become fearfully frequent of late years, making men apprehensive of still greater calamities to come.

14. What, according to the prophecy of Daniel, was to characterize the time of the end?

But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: *many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*” **Daniel 12:4.**

NOTES.—The time of the end began in 1798. See **Daniel 7:25; 11:35; 12:4, 9**, and the reading “The Kingdom and Work of Antichrist, under questions 5–8. Since 1798 there has been a most wonderful increase of all kinds of knowledge, both scientific and religious. Men have been “running to and fro” through both the world and the Word of God. The prophecies of Daniel are now themselves understood. Since 1798 five great Bible and tract societies have been organized; namely, the London Religious Tract Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, the American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, and the International Tract Society, besides many smaller societies of the same kind. From these have gone forth to the world hundreds of millions of copies of the Bible, and countless pages of tracts and pamphlets, disseminating knowledge upon the truths of salvation. Besides these, millions of copies of religious papers are being circulated annually in the various countries of the world. Missions have been established in all parts of the world. All this has been accomplished since 1798.

Concerning the increase of knowledge in the material, scientific, and intellectual worlds, see the next reading.

15. What is predicted of the moral condition of the world in the last days?

“This know also, that in *the last days perilous times shall come*. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” **2Timothy 3:1–5.**

16. How did the apostle Peter say the message of the Lord’s coming would be treated by some?

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days *scoffers*, walking after their own lusts, and *saying, Where is the*

promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” 2Peter 3:3, 4.

17. What will God’s faithful servants be doing at this time?

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, *to give them meat in due season?*”
Matthew 24:45.

NOTE — The “meat in due season” here spoken of evidently refers to the proclamation of the message based upon the signs which indicate the near approach of the Lord. The preaching of this message is what causes scoffers mockingly to ask, “Where is the *promise of His coming?*”

18. What are all admonished to do when these signs have appeared?

“Therefore *be ye also ready*: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” **Verse 44.**

19. How will Christ’s coming overtake those evil servants who say in their hearts, “My Lord delayeth His coming”?

“The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him, and in an hour that he is not aware of*, and shall *cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites*: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” **Verses 50, 51.**

WE know not the hour of the Master’s appearing,
Yet signs all foretell that the moment is nearing
When He shall return,—’tis a promise most cheering,—
But we know not the hour.

There s light for the wise who are seeking salvation,
There’s truth in the Book of the Lord’s revelation,
Each prophecy points to the great consummation,—
But we know not the hour.

We’ll watch and we’ll pray, with our lamps trimmed and burning,
We’ll work and we’ll wait till the Master’s returning,
We’ll sing and rejoice, every omen discerning,—
But we know not the hour.

F. E. BELDEN

