

The Signs of the Times

Have you ever had that “check engine” light come on in your car? What did you do about it? Ignore it? Really? Well, if you did you’re in good company. In a 2008 Harris poll, 10% of the people polled were driving a car with the “check engine” light on. Fifty percent of them said the light had been on for more than 3 months. The U.S. government forced carmakers to put this warning system in cars to, “...alert drivers when their vehicle was emitting too many emissions or had a serious mechanical problem.” The light can signify that something potentially costly or even dangerous to passengers is going on with the vehicle.

When asked further why they hadn’t taken their cars to a mechanic, the surveyors got a variety of responses. Some said they didn’t want to know what was wrong because they didn’t have the money to fix it anyway. Others said they just didn’t have time to deal with it and a few said, “The car seemed to be running fine,” so they assumed the warning light itself was malfunctioning. ⁱ

I wonder what the percentage is of people who have heard the warnings of Scripture but they’re ignoring them for the same reasons? They don’t want to believe the warnings because they think they don’t have the time or resources to make any changes in their lives anyway. Or, their lives seem to be going along just fine so they assume the warnings must be for someone else.

We come now in our study of Jesus’ Revelation message to several chapters that we might call the “check engine” lights of this book. They are revealing a series of “signs” that warn us of things to come and if we will take action today, we will be able to avoid the costly consequences that these signs warn us about. So, let’s see...

I. The Signs of the Tribulation

By definition, a “sign” in Scripture is a “meaningful God-given token, indicating what God has done, is doing or is about to do.”ⁱⁱ Here in chapters 12 and 13 Jesus gives us seven signs which represent real people (or groups of people) who are the key players in the great tribulation. First, I’ll show you the seven signs and who they represent and then I’ll describe how each fits into the storyline of the future. The seven signs and their meanings are:

1. The Woman – Rev. 12: 1, 2 represents the nation of Israel.
2. The Dragon – Rev. 12: 3, 4 represents Satan.
3. The Child – Rev. 12: 5, 6 represents Jesus.
4. The Archangel – Rev. 12: 7-12 is Michael
5. The Woman’s Offspring – Rev. 12:17 represents either the 144,000 Jewish evangelists or other Jews who convert to Christianity.
6. The Beast from the sea – Rev. 13: 1-10 represents the Anti-Christ.
7. The Beast out of the earth – Rev. 13:11-18 represents the False Prophet.

Now, what role do each of these characters play in the end-times story Jesus is telling? First, the Woman is the nation of Israel and as part of that, it is Mary, the mother of Jesus. We know this because of verse 5:

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. (Rev. 12:5)

The Dragon is Satan. Jesus states that in verse 9. What do we learn about Satan in this passage? We learn that he is God's enemy. Is. 14 and Ezekiel 28 describe how he is full of wisdom and beauty and was a "guardian cherub" which means he is a powerful warrior. Then, in Ezekiel it says: (Ezek. 28:17)

Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.

Here in Revelation, I believe that John is seeing a war that took place in the past. Satan fights against Michael, the archangel as it says in verse 7. And he lost and was thrown to the earth but he still, to this day, has access to the court of heaven. In Job, Satan appears IN PERSON before God to accuse Job. Verse 10 of Revelation 12 says that Satan is still doing that today, in the present:

For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. (Rev. 12:10)

If Satan is the enemy of God, then he's your enemy as well. What defense do we have against a "guardian cherub" who has great wisdom, beauty and power? Verse 11 tells us that we have three weapons that will defeat Satan every time: (Rev. 12:11)

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

We can defeat Satan by being covered with the blood of Jesus which is exactly what happens when we ask Him to forgive our sin.

But secondly, we can defeat Satan with a word of testimony. Did you know you have the power and authority to say, "Satan, get away from me! I testify against you! You are a liar! I'm covered with Christ's blood; you have no power over me!!" Say it! Don't quiver! Don't shrink back! You have the power of Jesus available to you.

Lastly, if you fully love Christ, you will no longer fear death. It may sting, but even as you slip into unconsciousness you will be able to say, "I have no fear. It is impossible for my enemy to defeat me. Even if I die, I will be raised to life again!" The enemy cannot win. We have multiple ways to defeat him.

But there's a second thing we learn about Satan here. It is this, his desire is to establish a kingdom on earth. What John is shown by Jesus is a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. What's that about? Jesus sends an angel to John to explain it in chapter 17: 12-14:

The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

The Dragon is Satan. The horns are ten kingdoms. The Beast from the sea is the Anti-Christ, the human puppet of Satan himself. This Beast is described again in Rev. 13:1

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.

Now, you might be saying, "Wait a minute. I thought the Red Dragon had the seven heads and ten horns. Is the Red Dragon the same as the beast?" Good catch, but no. They aren't the same person but closely related. The beast from the sea is the Anti-Christ. The Red Dragon is Satan who controls the Anti-Christ like a puppet. In fact, let me also introduce you to the second Beast, the one who comes out of the earth. **Rev. 13:11-12**

Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. (He looks like an innocent lamb, but his voice is the voice of Satan). He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.

Do you see what we now have with the Dragon and the two beasts? We have the unholy trinity. Satan does not have the power to create anything. He is enormously jealous of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit so his greatest act of deception will be to establish a false trinity to deceive the world into worshipping him. This deception will even include a faked resurrection of the false Christ, *"...whose fatal wound had been healed."* (v.3, 11) Satan doesn't have the power to resurrect anybody, but he does have the power of deception. What do you think the reaction would be in this country if a John F. Kennedy look-a-like, complete with scars on his head, suddenly appeared and ran for president? And if he claimed to be divine, would not people all over the world bow down and worship him? I'm not saying that is what is being predicted here, but something of that power is being predicted here. But it will all be a ruse. It will be a complete but convincing fake, all in an effort to bring people under the demonic power of Satan.

So, we've seen the Woman, the Dragon, Michael the Archangel and the two beasts. Who's left? The Child and the Woman's Offspring...

The Child is Jesus who reappears in chapter 14 as the Lamb alongside the Woman's Offspring. But once again, this is not a cuddly, cute, cowering lamb. No, this is the Lord of Lords, standing on Mount Zion, the earthly place of eternal power and authority. And guess who's with Him? It's the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who are in fact, the Offspring of the Woman Israel! Look at it:

And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder... And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000... They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. (Rev. 14:2-5, excerpts)

Throughout the rest of this revelation, we catch glimpses of Jesus. Each time now, He is winning the battle. He is standing tall in the place of authority. He is near the throne or on the throne. He is giving commands confidently. He is riding the white horse of victory. He is receiving praise, honor and worship. He is defeating evil. He is bringing into reality the overwhelming victory of God.

These are the seven main characters of the final battle between good and evil, holy and unholy, justice and injustice in this world. The final chapter of history is encapsulated in these seven. So, finally, what can we take away from all this?

II. The Sign of the Day of Harvest.

In John 4:35, Jesus said to his disciples:

Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Now, in Revelation 14, John sees Jesus seated on a cloud with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then John says:

...another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth and the earth was harvested.

Another angel (not Jesus) came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of [180 miles.] (Rev. 14:15-20)

Do you see the "check engine" light yet? It's not just on, it's flashing. Jesus is giving us a warning. When He was here 2,000 years ago, He said the fields were ripe. If they were ripe then, what are they now? He said we should join Him in the greatest work any person could ever do, help bring in the harvest, the harvest of souls. What have you been doing to help in this work? Layton Howerton wrote:

*The harvest is past, the summer is gone,
And still, some are not saved.
The workers in the field are few, just a skeleton crew,
'cause all, all have not obeyed.
But like a mighty combine, the Master's gonna come
And gather the wheat from Kansas to Capernaum
And He'll reclaim the land that sin and death had won
When the International Harvester comes. ⁱⁱⁱ*

We've talked about how Jesus keeps giving more and more chances to be rescued, but there's a simple truth in these chapters: once you die, there are no more chances. Those who teach that you can "pray" someone from purgatory to heaven, are simply wrong. The Bible does NOT teach that. The Bible says just the opposite. Heb. 9:27 plainly states:

...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

It doesn't say you die and go to a "place of purification." No, you die and face judgment. This world is the place of purification. If you don't ask to be purified here in this life, there's no second chance in the next life. Your soul will be harvested either by Jesus Himself or by the angel of death. Jesus tells the story of the guy who

died and went to hell because his soul had not been purified in this life. He calls over to heaven and asks Abraham to ask God to send someone to alert his brothers so they don't have to come where he is. Abraham says, "*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets (The Bible) they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*" (Luke 16: 31)

As Christians, we won't go through the Great Tribulation but are you at all concerned about those who are in danger of doing so? Are you even aware of how perilously close we appear to be to those days beginning? Jesus said, "*...when you see all these things (wars, earthquakes, famines, Christians hated by all nations), you know that it is near, right at the door.*" (Matt. 24:33) Whom could you talk to about God's offer of grace and mercy this week? Do you want to know a great way to do that? Invite them to our Alpha ministry this Thursday. It's not too late to join. Judgment is real. The Harvest is real. And forgiveness is available. Let's take the grace we receive here today and offer it to someone who needs it this week. That's how we can participate in the greatest work on earth – the Harvest. Let's pray...

ⁱ Associated Press, "Ten Percent of U.S. Drivers Have Their 'Check Engine' Light On," www.yahoo.com (6-10-08) and "Snapshots: How long the light's been on," USA Today (6-22-08)

ⁱⁱ *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 1185

ⁱⁱⁱ Layton Howerton, *International Harvester* from his "Boxing God" album.