

2. Signs of the Times

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2. THE SIGNS GIVEN US BY CHRIST



We Orthodox Christians have already recognized and accepted the signs of Christ's First Coming. The very fact that we're Orthodox Christians means that we've done this. We know what these signs mean: for example, the sign of Jonah, the 490 years of Daniel, and many other things which our Lord fulfilled. Our Orthodox Divine services are filled with Old Testament prophecies which were fulfilled in the coming of Christ. These we all see and recognize—it all seems clear. But now we have to look for different kinds of signs, that is, the signs of the Second Coming of Christ. The whole teaching about the Second Coming of Christ and the signs which will precede it is set forth in several places in the Gospels, especially in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew. St. Mark and St. Luke also have chapters about this.

This chapter of St. Matthew tells of how our Lord departed from the Temple, and how his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the Temple. Of course, in those days the Temple was the center of worship. Every Jew had to come to the Temple at least at Pascha, the Passover, for this alone was where God could be worshipped in the right way.

Our Lord looked at the Temple and told His disciples, "See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you: There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." To tell a believing Jew at that time that the whole Temple is to be thrown down, that nothing is to be left of it, is like saying it's the end of the world, because the Temple is precisely the place where God is supposed to be worshipped. How are you going to worship God if there's no Temple? So these words of our Savior made the disciples start thinking about the end of the world. They immediately said, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" In other words, they already knew that He was going to come again and that this would be bound up with the end of the world. [Next..](#)

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Then our Lord gives a whole set of signs which are to come to pass before He comes again. First of all He says, "Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in My name saying, 'I am Christ'; and shall lead man astray." That is, many false Christs will come. This we've already seen throughout the history of the Church: those who have risen up against the Church, those who have pretended to be God, pretended to be Christ. Secondly, in the next verse He says, "Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. Se that ye be not troubled, for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Of course, from the very beginning of

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the Christian era there have been wars and rumors of wars, and even more so in our time. "nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquake in diverse places." Again, wars, then famines, earthquakes. And He says, "All these things are the beginning of tribulation."

Then comes the next sign, which is persecutions. "Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake." So, first we have false Christs, then wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions—and then a very important sign for our times concerning the growing cold of love: "Because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of many shall wax cold." This is the most deadly of all the signs, because the sign of Christians, as St. John the Theologian tells us, is that they have love for each other. When this love grows cold, this means that even the Christians are beginning to lose Christianity.

Then another sign, in the next verse of the 24th chapter: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nation, and then shall the end come." This sign of the Gospel being preached unto all the nations we see about us now. The Gospel itself is produced in hundreds of languages now to almost all the tribes of the earth, and Orthodox Christianity is being preached in almost every country of the world. In Africa there are great missions: in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, the Congo, and spreading out from there.

The a more difficult place: our Lord speaks concerning the abomination of desolation which is spoke of by Daniel the prophet. "When you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand)." That is, you're supposed to understand this from something else. This is another sign. It is concerned, of course, with the Temple in Jerusalem and some kind of desecration of it.

Then, in the 21st verse, there is the sign of great tribulation: "Then shall be great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall be." That is, it will be the worst and most difficult time of suffering in the whole history of the world. You can read history books and find that there have been many times in the history of the world when there was great suffering. If you read about what happened to the Jews when Jerusalem was taken after the death of Christ, you will find that such suffering as went on then was unparalleled. In other places there has been almost as much suffering. And yet the great tribulation at the very end will be much worse. Of course, it will be worldwide and involve everyone, not just one people, and will be something of a very impressive character. It will be called "such tribulation that the world has never seen."

Just after this time, something even worse begins to come. Verse 29 reads: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." Such an event, of course, has never been before, and this obviously refers to the time just at the end of the world, when the whole of creation prepares to be annihilated in order to be refashioned.

Finally, the next verse: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven," that is, the sign of the Cross will appear in the sky. "And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn,

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and they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." That is, the very coming of Christ shall be in the heavens with the sign of the Cross—and that is the very end of everything.

After telling all this about the signs of the end, our Lord gives a final command, saying, "Watch, therefore, for you know not on what day your Lord cometh.... Therefore, be also ready, for in an hour that you think not, the Son of Man cometh."

All this is in the 24th chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew. But all this, for anyone not thoroughly acquainted with Scriptures and the writings of Holy Fathers, almost raises more question than it solves. We must understand what is the meaning of all these prophecies. How can we know when they are really being fulfilled? And how can we avoid false interpretations?—because there are many false Christs, false prophets, false prophecies, false interpretations. How can we know what is the true interpretation and what are the true signs of the times? IF you look about you and go to any religious bookstore, you will see shelves containing many books of commentaries on the Book of Revelation (The Apocalypse), books with interpretations about the coming end of the world. In fact many Christians who are not Orthodox have a very definite feeling that these are the last times, but they all give interpretations based upon their own opinions.