

Signs of the Times

Bible Prophecy, Part 2

☑ **Target:** *Watch for the signs of the times!*

Key Verses

Matthew 24:29–31—Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Suggested Bible Reading

☐ The Endtime and Jesus' Return: Luke 21; John 14; 1 Thessalonians 4–5; 2 Thessalonians 2; 1 Timothy 4; 2 Timothy 3.

Other Recommended Reading

☐ *Bible Basics: "The Endtime"*

Prayer and Praise: For Those in Authority

Your Word in the Bible tells us we should pray for the kings and the rulers and the magistrates and the judges and the police and those that have the rule over us and who are in authority (1 Timothy 2:1–2). You told us that they are there to keep the peace and to protect us so that we might live in peace (Romans 13). So we thank You for them and for the peace we have at this time. We pray that they will do the best they can to give us good government, peace, and prosperity. They have very great problems, and they have a very difficult job. We pray that goodness and right will triumph over evil. Please help them in each decision to choose the right and fair way. If they already know You, Lord, then we pray that You will please help them to acknowledge You in their decision-making so that You can direct them. If they do not know You, at least help them to be led by a right conscience and to do that which will benefit the poor and needy. You also said in your Word that "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Samuel 23:3).

We ask You to help those in authority in this land to be just and to have a fear of You. Please keep the peace within our borders and with our neighbors, that we may dwell in safety and have peace to spread Your Gospel of peace. Amen.

Meditation: "Now Learn the Parable of the Fig Tree..."

"When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!" (Matthew 24:32–33).

In His Word, the Lord specified what the various Endtime events will be, so when we see them unfold, we can say, "There's another proof that He's about to return!" For us who love Jesus, every sign of His soon coming is like another blossom announcing spring. No matter how terrible the world situation may seem to be, every Endtime sign is another flower, and another beautiful fulfillment of His prophecies.

Throughout the winter it seems like everything is dead; the trees are leafless and it looks as though the ground is lifeless. But as that great sun begins to appear and it grows warmer day by day, the flowers just seem to jump out of the soil, the trees begin to blossom and that which seems to be dead comes to life again! It's like a resurrection!

Jesus is like the sun to us! And as He draws nearer, we too begin to blossom! As these Last Day events transpire, we'll blossom and bloom and cover the Earth with our witness as we point to the soon-coming Kingdom of God!

In a message from Jesus, He told us:

These are days of preparation for that which is ahead. For I bring you along hand in hand, leading you, guiding you, preparing you, strengthening you, giving you what you need as you enter into these Last Days.

Whether you are prepared or not, the time will come, shortly. I try to prepare you, but your preparedness depends upon you—upon your willingness, your openness, your yieldedness, your desire for the things of the Spirit. For as a soldier learns the art of warfare, so must you learn to use My weapons of the Spirit. So must you learn to be strengthened in My Spirit. I test you and probe you now that I may know what you are made of, so that in the time of those tests that are ahead, you will have the means to stand.

Use this time of peace to prepare for the war of the spirit that is ahead. For these are the days of preparation, the days of training, the days of testings. These are the days that come before the time of the end.

<To think about> Are you looking out for the "signs of the times"?

Putting the Word into Action: Look out for the Signs of the Times

Signs to watch out for (Matthew 24:1–2)

- Deceivers and false prophets: Matthew 24:4–5,11,24; 2 Thessalonians 2:10–11; 1 Timothy 4:11
- Wars and rumors of wars: Matthew 24:6
- Civil wars: Matthew 24:7
- Famines: Matthew 24:7
- Pestilences: Matthew 24:7
- Earthquakes and other natural disasters: Matthew 24:7
- Persecution of God's people: Matthew 24:9
- Love of many growing cold: Matthew 24:12; 2 Timothy 3:1–4; Jeremiah 2:34
- Gospel preached in all the world: Matthew 24:14
- Antichrist One World dictator and government: Matthew 24:15–21; Daniel 11:31; Revelation 13:14–15
- Mark of the Beast: Revelation 13:16–18
- Deceivers and false prophets: Matthew 24:23–28

Chronology of the future

- The Great Tribulation: Matthew 24:21–22
- The return of Jesus Christ: Matthew 24:29–31

- ☐ The dead in Christ raised; living Christians raptured: 1 Thessalonians 4:14,16–17; 1 Corinthians 15:52
- ☐ Celebration in Heaven: Revelation 19:6–8
- ☐ The wrath of God upon earth: Isaiah 26:21; 13:9–11; Revelation 14:9–10
- ☐ The Battle of Armageddon: Revelation 16:16; 19:19–20
- ☐ God’s Kingdom ruling on earth for 1,000 years, the Millennium: Revelation 20:4–6; 2:26–27; 5:10; Daniel 2:44; 7:27
- ☐ Battle of Gog and Magog at the end of the Millennium; the Devil cast into the Lake of Fire: Revelation 20:7–10; Psalm 1:2–5; 2 Peter 3:10–13
- ☐ The Great White Throne Judgement: Revelation 20:11–12; Luke 12:47–48
- ☐ New Heaven and New Earth: Revelation chapters 21 and 22

News Clippings: Watching out for the Signs of the Times!

Deceivers and a falling away

Falling away from true faith

Germany. (*Religion Today*) German churches are facing a “fall into insignificance,” according to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*. Churches are losing members in droves, political leaders ignore the moral admonitions of clergy, and Christian values are having less impact on society, reported Idea, an evangelical Christian news service in Germany. According to a recent poll, only 37% of the German population think the church should teach moral values. The German public believes the police, political parties, and the environmental organization Greenpeace are more qualified than churches to pass along moral values.

England. (*The Sunday Times*) More than 70 serving Anglican priests are members of an organization that does not believe in the literal truth of the Bible, the existence of God, or the resurrection.

Canada. (*Religion Today*) Many Canadians have left Christianity—or simply ignore it as irrelevant. In 1991, 82% of Canadians identified in some way with the Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox faiths. By 1996, the figure had fallen to 68%.

Europe. (*Washington Post Foreign Service*) Late-century Europe can easily be called the most godless quarter on earth. More than half of Europe’s citizens still profess to be Catholics, while nearly a third identify themselves as Protestants. Yet few attend church regularly—a century-old trend whose pace quickened in the social upheavals of the 1960s.

The spirit of the age

Popular culture is often linked to a “post-modern” spirit of the age—one in which ideas of right and wrong and moral sense are simply choices individuals make.

“We had a reporter recently call to ask if genocide could be categorized as something ‘wrong,’” says John Seel of the Postmodernism Project at the University of Virginia. “What you see these days is a total lack of any authority in intellectual life. Everything is just OK as long as you think it is.”

“Absolutophobia”

By John Leo, *US News and World Report*

Overdosing on nonjudgmentalism is a growing problem in the schools. Two disturbing articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* say that some students are unwilling to oppose large moral horrors, including human sacrifice, ethnic cleansing, and slavery, because they think that no one has the right to criticize the moral views of another group or culture.

One of the articles is by Prof. Robert Simon, who teaches philosophy at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y. The other is by Kay Haugaard, who teaches creative writing at Pasadena City College in California. Haugaard writes that her students have a lot of trouble expressing any moral reservations or objections about human sacrifice. The subject came up when she taught her class Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” a short story about a small American farm town where one person is killed each year to make the crops grow.

One male said “the ritual killing in ‘The Lottery’ almost seems a need.” Asked if she believed in human sacrifice, a woman said, “I really don’t know. If it was a religion of long standing...” Haugaard writes: “I was stunned. This was the woman who wrote so passionately of saving the whales, of her rescue and tender care of a stray dog.”

Christina Hoff Sommers, Professor of Philosophy at Clark University in Massachusetts, points to a general problem of so many students coming to college “dogmatically committed to a moral relativism that offers them no grounds to think” about cheating, stealing, and other moral issues. Simon calls this “absolutophobia”—the unwillingness to say that some behavior is just plain wrong. The trend among some campus thinkers is to deny the existence of any objective truth: All we can have are clashing perspectives, not true moral knowledge. Values emerge as personal preferences, as unsuited for criticism or argument as personal decisions on pop music or clothes.

Wars and rumors of wars

The tragedy of war

At the Imperial War Museum in London, England, visitors are intrigued by a unique clock and digital counter. This clock does not keep time. Its purpose is to help people grasp the magnitude of a central feature of the past century—war. As the hand of the clock rotates, the counter adds another number to its tally every 3.31 seconds. Each number represents a man, woman or child who has died as a result of war during the 20th century.

At midnight on December 31, 1999, the counting registered 100 million, a conservative estimate of the number of those who have died in war during the past 100 years.

Imagine, 100 million people! Yet that statistic reveals nothing about the terrors and pain experienced by the victims. Neither does it describe the suffering of the loved ones of those who died—the countless millions of mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, widows and orphans. What the statistic does tell us is this: Ours has been by far the most destructive century in all human history; its savagery is unparalleled.

The history of the 20th century also shows to what extent humans have become expert in the craft of killing. Throughout history the development of new weapons went slowly until the 20th century, which has produced an avalanche of weapons. When the first world war began in 1914, the armies of Europe included men on horseback, armed with lances. Today, with the help of satellite sensors and computerized guidance systems, missiles can deliver death to any part of the earth, with astonishing accuracy. The intervening years have seen the development and perfecting of guns, tanks, submarines, warplanes, biological and chemical weapons, and, of course, “the bomb.”

When the Cold War ended in 1989, many expressed confidence in a peaceful world order. Still, war continued. During the next seven years, an estimated 101 conflicts raged in various places. Most were wars not between states but within states. They were fought by opposing groups with unsophisticated weapons. In Rwanda, for example, much of the killing was done with machetes.

Often the modern battlefields are towns and villages, and there is little or no distinction between combatants and civilians. Michael Harbottle, director of the Center for International Peacebuilding, wrote: “Whereas in the past the causes of conflict may have been fairly predictable, today they are much more complex and much more difficult to control. The degree of violence which accompanies them is unbelievable and totally irrational. Civilian inhabitants are as much in the firing line as the fighters.” Such low-tech conflict shows little sign of fading away.

Meanwhile, in the rich nations of the world, high-tech weapon development continues apace. Sensors—whether deployed in the air, in space, in the ocean, or on the ground—enable a modern army to see more quickly and clearly than ever before, even in difficult terrain such as jungles. As the new technologies are perfected and integrated, “distance warfare” moves toward reality, enabling an army to see everything, hit everything, and destroy much that an enemy has.

In considering the prospect of future war, we should not forget the menacing presence of nuclear weapons. *The Futurist* magazine predicts: “The continuing proliferation of atomic weapons makes it increasingly likely that we shall have one or more atomic wars within the next 30 years. In addition, atomic weapons may be used by terrorists.”

What has frustrated efforts to achieve global peace? An obvious factor is that the human family is fragmented into nations and cultures that distrust, hate or fear one another. There are conflicting values, perceptions and goals. Furthermore, use of military power has for millenniums been seen as a legitimate way to pursue national interests. After acknowledging this situation, a report from the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College stated: “To many, this implied that peace would only come with world government.”

Wars rage in third of world nations

Associated Press

The 20th century came to a close with a third of the world’s 193 nations embroiled in conflict, nearly twice the Cold War level, a group that keeps track of battle zones reported. In its annual report, the National Defense Council Foundation blamed rising military coups and a backlash against democracy, a trend it suggested could continue for several years. The foundation listed 65 conflicts in 1999, up from 60 the year before.

Famines

The coexistence of feast and famine

Los Angeles Times—1998

In the second half of the 20th century, famine no longer is a scourge of nature but results from war, politics and other misdeeds of man.

Thanks to breakthroughs in science and agriculture, the world now produces enough food to feed every man, woman and child on the planet. But hunger and starvation persist. And in many places, they appear to be worsening.

Despite a worldwide glut of food, 18 million people die of starvation, malnutrition and related causes every year, according to a newly released Johns Hopkins University study. And more than 800 million people are chronically undernourished, U.N. statistics show.

More often than not, the reasons for this cruel paradox—hunger in the midst of global plenty—have little to do with natural causes. Of the millions who go hungry every day, “we estimate that only 10% are victims of disaster,” said World Food Program Executive Director Catherine Bertini.

At last year’s World Food Summit in Rome, a U.S. Department of Agriculture report identified some of the forces that create hunger: war and civil strife, misguided national policies, trade barriers such as crop subsidies, technology, environmental degradation, poverty, and gender inequality.

Water crisis “likely to hit 40 countries”

South China Morning Post/Associated Press—1999

More than a billion people lack safe, clean water and the problem will worsen next century, experts say.

Most of the projected water shortages in 2025 would be in Africa and the Middle East, but India, parts of China, Peru, England and Poland would also be affected, said a newly formed commission that focuses on world water supplies.

The commission said the problem could afflict more than 40 countries in all. A United Nations analysis found that 1.4 billion people now lacked safe and reliable water. Water-related diseases killed from five million to seven million people annually, experts said. The UN said up to half of the population of the developing world suffered from such diseases at any given time.

The UN said shortages would affect 2.3 billion people, or 30 percent of the world’s population, in more than 40 nations by 2025.

Ismail Serageldin, chairman of the World Commission on Water, said “Water is life. Shortage of fresh water is ... going to be one of the major problems of the 21st century.”

China disasters century’s deadliest

AP—12/14/99

China experienced three of the century’s four deadliest weather-related disasters, two drought-induced famines that killed more than 29 million people and a Yangtze River flood that claimed 3.7 million lives.

Despite 11,000 deaths in Central America, last year’s Hurricane Mitch does not rank near the top of the century’s deadliest incidents. Looking back over the century, experts of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found famine brought on by drought deadlier than storms or floods like the Yangtze disaster of 1931. Most of the famine deaths were in Asia. A 1907 episode killed more than 24 million Chinese. Also in China, the “New Famine” of 1936 killed an estimated 5 million Chinese, and a drought in 1941–2 more than 3 million.

Pestilences

News Clips

Tuberculosis. (*Reuters*) TB infects a third of the earth’s population, killing nearly 3 million people every year, spreading swiftly and freely through the air. Half the people infected don’t realize they have the disease, which health authorities talk only of trying to control. Eradication is not even on the horizon. The World Health Organization estimates that more people will die from TB this year than in any other year in history.

Malaria. (*BBC*) It is estimated that at any time 2.5 billion people are at risk from malaria. It kills 3 million a year; 500 million are made very ill. Most cases occur in tropical Africa and Southeast Asia. According to recent studies, malaria is more prevalent today than it has been at any other period in history. More than 90 countries have malaria during all or part of the year, and at any given time, up to 300 million people are infected with the disease.

Sleeping sickness. (*CNN*) On the African continent, in the narrow band between the 15th parallels that bookend the equator, a tiny fly is jeopardizing the lives of 55 million people and could be responsible for one of the largest epidemics of this century. The bite of the tsetse fly can carry a parasite that will work its way through your body and, if left untreated, put you on course for a slow, agonizing and certain death. It's called the sleeping sickness. 25,000 new cases of sleeping sickness are diagnosed each year. Dr. Michaleen Richer of the International Medical Corps said the prevalence of sleeping sickness has risen by more than 15 percent. "This is an epidemic of really catastrophic proportions," Richer added.

Dengue fever. (*Reuters*) Scientists have warned that rising global temperatures could bring more than floods and severe weather—they may allow for the wider spread of tropical illnesses like dengue fever. The World Health Organization estimates that 2.5 billion people are currently at risk from dengue fever. More than 240,000 cases were reported in Brazil in 1997. Dengue fever killed 40 people in Venezuela in 1997, and infected 32,000. A recent outbreak in Fiji killed eight people and infected 6,500.

Pneumonia. (*MSNBC*) A new study shows that the bacterium called streptococcus pneumonia is penicillin-resistant in almost half of all cases. A few years ago doctors could always assume that penicillin would kill the pneumonia-causing organism. Now they always have to take into account the possibility that penicillin won't work. "When the bacterium enters the bloodstream, up to 20 percent of the people over age 65 may die of it," says Dr. Jay Cutler of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. "And mortality approaches 40 percent among those age 80 and over." But the bacteria do not strike only the elderly. The same germ is responsible for most childhood ear infections—which can spread to the blood and the brain if not stopped.

Bubonic plague. (*AP*) For the first time, scientists have found a strain of the plague that is resistant to all the antibiotics normally used to treat and prevent the deadly infectious disease. The plague, the Black Death that killed one-fourth of the European population in the 1300s, is spread by fleas that have bitten infected rats and other rodents or by sneezes and coughs from infected people. Plague is considered a re-emerging disease by the World Health Organization. The number of cases reported each year is growing, cases are cropping up in more places and epidemics happened in 1994 in East Africa, Madagascar, Peru and India.

Rift Valley Fever. (*BBC*) An outbreak of the hemorrhagic disease Rift Valley Fever is now estimated to have infected 89,000 people and killed more than 400 in northeastern Kenya and in Somalia. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN has categorized the outbreak as an international disaster because of fears that infected mosquitoes and animals may spread the disease to other countries.

Influenza. (*Electronic Telegraph*) The influenza virus has developed the ability to circumvent the human body's main defense against the disease, raising the prospect of a deadly new global outbreak, scientists have discovered. Dr Klaus Stohr, the leader of the World Health Organization's global influenza program, called the 1997 outbreak "the last warning from nature" that the world must prepare for a flu pandemic similar to that of 1918, when 50 million people died.

AIDS (*UNAIDS, World Health Organization, and other sources*) 5 million new HIV infections occurred in 2002. 3.1 million people died of AIDS that year, bringing the total of AIDS-related deaths to 6.4 million. As of the end of 2002, over 42 million people are living with HIV / AIDS. Around the world, close to 14,000 every day are infected with HIV. In the 45 most affected countries, it is projected that, between 2000 and 2020, 68 million people will die prematurely as a result of AIDS.

Tuberculosis: Every second, someone on earth is infected

Awake! (May 22, 1999)

Tuberculosis (TB) is man's oldest infectious killer, and it remains such a serious health threat that the World Health Organization (WHO) compares it to a time bomb. Worldwide, TB kills more people than AIDS, malaria, and tropical diseases combined: 8,000 persons each day. Some 20 million people now suffer from active TB, and some 30 million could die from it in the next ten years—a number larger than the population of Canada.

The cure for TB was discovered more than four decades ago. Since then, over 120 million people have died of TB, and nearly 3 million more people will die this year. Why are so many people still dying from TB when there is a cure? For three main reasons: neglect, HIV/AIDS, and multidrug-resistant TB.

Diabetes becoming worldwide epidemic

Yahoo!

Diabetes is spreading from rich countries like the U.S. and turning into a worldwide epidemic as much of the developing world turns to more sedentary lifestyles, Reuters reported. Diabetes cases are expected to climb 170 percent in developing nations over the next three decades, said scientists from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Scientists expect 22 million Americans will have diabetes by 2025, up from 16 million today. The disease, which is associated with obesity and inactivity, is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States, killing nearly 200,000 people every year.

Earthquakes and other natural disasters

Quakes kill more than 21,000 in 2001

Associated Press

Researchers say 2001 was a particularly deadly year for earthquakes, with 65 significant quakes worldwide blamed for killing more than 21,000 people. To be precise, the U.S. Geological Survey said 21,436 people died in earthquakes last year. The toll was significantly higher than in 2000, when 225 earthquake deaths were reported worldwide. On average, 10,000 people die in earthquakes annually, the USGS said.

Millions of minor earthquakes occur annually. Significant earthquakes are those of magnitude 6.5 or greater or those that cause fatalities, injuries or substantial damage. During a typical year, 18 major earthquakes (magnitude 7.0 to 7.9) and one great earthquake (8.0 or higher) occur worldwide, the USGS said.

Quakes and floods bigger killers than terror in 2002

Reuters

Despite rising concern around the world about terrorism, the past year saw far more people killed by natural disasters than any man-made catastrophe.

Munich Re, the world's biggest reinsurance company, said in an annual report on natural disasters that 11,000 people were killed by floods, earthquakes, storms and other extreme weather in 2002, and worse was likely to follow.

"Although in the case of man-made catastrophes the year 2002 was marked by numerous air crashes, shipping accidents, major fires, and further terrorist attacks, they were far from reaching the same extent of (economic) loss or number of victims as the natural catastrophes," Munich Re said.

This year's death toll was lower than the 25,000 in 2001, when an earthquake in the western Indian state of Gujarat killed at least 19,700 people, but economic losses from such disasters soared to \$55 billion, Munich Re said.

Izmit's dogs howled

By Robert Fisk, *The Independent*

At around 3 o'clock in the morning of Monday, August 16, Kanieh Topal woke in her three-story apartment block in the western suburbs of Izmit to hear a strange sound. "All the dogs were howling," she said.

Nature, it seems, was trying to warn the people of Izmit and Yalova and Golcuk and Istanbul and a thousand other towns and villages across 450 miles of Turkey. Twelve miles beneath them, the great tectonic plates of the north Anatolian rock fault had begun to move.

Exactly 24 hours after the dogs had given the people of Izmit their warning, the 12-mile deep fissure cracked, snapping open the earth's crust and visiting desolation on the sleeping humans above. In the space of 45 to 90 seconds, well over 100,000 apartment blocks, hotels, hospitals, shops, factories and private houses thundered to the ground in what one survivor described as an "atomic" explosion. As the sun dawned a dark crimson through the dust that hung for miles above northwestern Turkey, it was clear that its people had suffered the equivalent of a small-scale nuclear holocaust. Thousands died, and tens of thousands were injured.

But it was the construction companies and bribery of the late Seventies and early Eighties that had doomed the people. Every time neighbors pulled at shards of concrete, the material broke off in their

hands. Concrete is made from sand and cement. The less cement and the more sand you use, the cheaper. In effect, many of the doomed were living in houses made from sand.

We call them “acts of God,” but it is usually human actions that turn natural phenomena into disasters. Eighty percent of earthquake deaths are caused by collapsing buildings. More than half of all buildings in Turkey, according to the local Architects’ Chamber, are built in violation of construction rules. Often they are put up without planning permission, with inspectors turning a blind eye; and politicians frequently grant amnesties for illegal buildings as elections approach.

This is just one example of a global problem. Most of the 100,000 people who died in an earthquake in Armenia in 1988 were in cheap concrete buildings. It was much the same in the Peru earthquake of 1970, which killed 60,000. And even in Japan, most of the buildings that collapsed in the 1995 Kobe earthquake, in which 5,000 died, were poor constructions rushed up after the Second World War.

“During this century more than 1.5 million people have lost their lives as a result of earthquakes, and the vast majority of this toll is because of building design,” said Ed Booth of the engineers Ove Arup and Partners, after the Kobe disaster.

Poverty is also to blame. The Red Cross points out that the poor can often afford only badly built housing. An earthquake in Guatemala City, which killed 23,000 in 1976, became known as the “class quake” because of the accuracy with which it hit the poor.

“Floods,” the Red Cross adds, “also target the poor.” They are hit disproportionately, whether crowded on to low-lying sandbars off the Bangladesh coast or the steep slopes of Rio de Janeiro.

By the time Hurricane Mitch hit Central America last autumn it had been downgraded to a tropical storm. But it caused the worst disaster ever to hit the western hemisphere because its rains struck denuded hillsides, causing mudslides in which 10,000 died.

Persecution of God’s people

Examples around the world...

Central Asia and former Soviet countries. (*Forum 18 bulletin, July 2003*) An alarming number of states raid religious meetings to close down services and punish those who take part. Turkmenistan is the worst offender: it treats all non-Russian Orthodox and non-Muslim worship as illegal. Uzbekistan and Belarus specifically ban unregistered religious services. In Belarus, numerous Protestant congregations—some numbering more than a thousand members—cannot meet because they cannot get a registered place to worship. Officials in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan also raid places where worship is being conducted.

Turkmenistan has dismissed from state jobs hundreds of active Protestants, Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious minorities. Armenia has ordered local police chiefs to persuade police who were members of faiths other than the Armenian Apostolic Church to abandon their faith. If persuasion failed, such employees were to be sacked. Belarus has subjected leaders of independent Orthodox Churches and Hindus to pressure—including fines, threats and inducements—to abandon their faith or emigrate. Officials in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus repeatedly attack disfavoured religious minorities in the media, insulting their beliefs, accusing them falsely of illegal or “destructive” activities, as well as inciting popular hostility to them. Turkmen and Azeri officials try to persuade people to abandon their faith and “return” to their ancestral faith (Islam).

France and Belgium. (IHF, News Release July 2003) Since the mid-1990s, the Belgian and French governments have been engaged in efforts to monitor and warn the public of religious groups depicted as “harmful sects.” These policies have primarily targeted religious groups that have never been engaged in anything but peaceful and lawful activities, and have encouraged prejudice and intolerance toward them. The governments in the two countries have not taken any effective measures to counteract the hostility and discrimination suffered by members of religious groups depicted as “sects.” The “anti-sect” policies pursued by the Belgian and French governments have also set a problematic precedent for former socialist countries that have sought to present restrictive policies toward “new” religious movements as democratically acceptable.

Malaysia. (*AP, April 2003*) Malaysian church leaders and lawyers have urged the government to lift a ban on a Bible in the Iban language. The Bible is widely used by churches in Malaysia’s Sarawak state on Borneo island, where the Iban people are one of the largest indigenous groups. The Home Ministry announced that this Bible was among 35 books banned effective immediately because they were considered detrimental to public peace.

Egypt. (*Barnabas Fund, June 2003*) Naglaa, a Christian convert from Islam, and her husband Malak have been held in prison since mid-February in an effort to force Naglaa to give up her Christian faith and return to Islam, to leave her husband, and to raise her children as Muslims. Naglaa and her husband Malak Gawargios Fahmy were arrested at the airport as they tried to leave Egypt for Cyprus. Under Egyptian law, and it is prohibited for Christian men to marry Muslim women.)

Laos and Vietnam. (*Christian Solidarity Worldwide [CSW], July 2003*) Persecuted Christians have been driven off their lands and face destitution. 21 Bru Christians were imprisoned in Savannakhet, Laos. One man is serving a sentence of 15 years in Udomsay Province for his religious activities. In Vietnam, unregistered Christians face threats, persecution, and eviction from their land, as well as destruction of church buildings, beatings, forced conversions and demands for renunciation of their faith.

Eritrea. (*CSW, 2003*) Persecution of independent Protestant churches continues. At Easter, two Evangelical Lutheran Church members were arrested and detained for three days. In Sahel, military police forcibly conscripted sixteen female and forty male Pentecostal Christians, although all had completed their mandatory military service.

Bhutan. (*CSW, 2001*) The government of Bhutan has stepped up its persecution of Christians. Bhutanese authorities and police moved in to churches on Palm Sunday to register the names of believers. Many pastors were detained, interrogated, and threatened with imprisonment. The authorities want Christians to stop witnessing and have closed many churches. Forms have been circulated requiring Christians to comply with "rules and regulations governing the practice of religion."

China. (*CSW, 2001*) Important official documents revealing centralized coordinated plans to crack down on and eliminate specific religious groups have been disclosed. One of the documents issued by the Ministry of Public Security, entitled "Notice on Various Issues Regarding Identifying and Banning of Cultic Organizations" lists 14 groups identified as cults. Some of the doctrines condemned as heresies in the document are beliefs widely held by Christians around the world, such as praying for healing. The Shouters and the All Sphere Church (founded by Xu Yongze) are listed as cults, with reference also made to the South China Church. The head of the South China Church, Gong Sheng Liang has been sentenced to death, along with four other leaders of the group.

Russia. (*CSW, 2001*) Russian proposals for a new state policy on religion would give broad social access solely to those confessions deemed "traditional" there. An earlier state policy on national security adopted shortly after Vladimir Putin became acting president last January refers to the need to "counter the negative impact of foreign missionaries," who, some state officials believe, are western agents bent on destabilizing the nation and seizing control of Russia's Far East. When the Moscow municipal authorities recently refused to renew the legal status of the Salvation Army in the capital, a local court cited the church's subordination to a foreign center of authority among the grounds for the decision.

Europe spars over faith

Compiled from articles in *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Religion Today*

While violence has flared between and against faiths in several regions of the world, quieter forms of persecution have emerged in Europe. On a continent that helped nourish the concept of universal human rights, religious freedom is taking some serious blows.

And these blows are falling not just in Eastern Europe, where countries may still be struggling with the aftermath of atheistic pasts, but also in the heart of Western Europe, where a few governments have taken it upon themselves to call a whole host of minority religions "dangerous sects."

Rijk Van Dam, a Dutch member of the European Parliament, told a human-rights conference sponsored by the Rutherford Institute that many countries agree to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but practice "brutal deeds" against religious believers. "Persecution because of religious belief, torture and torment, and unfair and dishonest trials are the order of the day."

Europe is so secularized that it treats active minority religious groups as threats, Pedro Moreno, Rutherford's international director, told *Religion Today*.

France and Belgium have set up commissions to look into sects and published reports with lists of more than 170 "harmful" groups without consulting with the groups or with scholars in the field. "This resulted," says the *IHF*, "in media reports libeling minority religions, circulation of rumors and false information, and incitement of religious intolerance."

Love of many growing cold

Love gone cold: Kofi Annan's astonishing facts

New York Times News Service

Every year the *United Nations Human Development Report* looks for a new way to measure the lives of people. Putting aside faceless statistics like per capita gross domestic product, the report burrows into the facts about what children eat, who goes to school, whether there is clean water to drink, and so on. This year, the report takes its first look at what people have—from simple toilets to family cars—and what proportion of the world's goods and services are consumed, comparatively, by the rich and the poor. The pie is huge—the world's consumption bill is \$24 trillion a year—but some servings are very small indeed.

The haves. The richest fifth of the world's people consumes 86% of all goods and services while the poorest fifth consumes just 1.3%. Indeed, the richest fifth consumes 45% of all meat and fish, 58% of all energy used and 84% of all paper, has 74% of all telephone lines and owns 87% of all vehicles.

Natural resources. Since 1970, the world's forests have declined from 4.4 square miles per 1,000 people to 2.8 square miles per 1,000 people. In addition, a quarter of the world's fish stocks have been depleted or are in danger of being depleted and another 44% are being fished at their biological limit.

The ultra rich. The three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the 48 least developed countries.

Africa. The average African household today consumes 20% less than it did 25 years ago.

The super rich. The world's 225 richest individuals, of whom 60 are Americans, have a combined wealth of over \$1 trillion—equal to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the entire world's population.

Cosmetics and education. Americans spend \$8 billion a year on cosmetics—\$2 billion more than the estimated total needed to provide basic education for everyone in the world.

The have-nots. Of the 4.4 billion people in developing countries, nearly three-fifths lack access to safe sewers, a third have no access to clean water, a quarter do not have adequate housing, and a fifth have no access to modern health services of any kind.

Meat. Americans each consume an average of 260 pounds of meat a year. In Bangladesh, the average is six and a half pounds.

Telephone lines. Sweden and the U.S. have 681 and 626 telephone lines per 1,000 people, respectively. Afghanistan, Cambodia, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have one line per 1,000 people.

Ice cream and water. Europeans spend \$11 billion a year on ice cream—\$2 billion more than the estimated annual total needed to provide clean water and safe sewers for the world's population.

Land mines. More than 110 million active land mines are scattered in 68 countries, with an equal number stockpiled around the world. Every month more than 2,000 people are killed or maimed by mine explosions.

Pet food and health. Americans and Europeans spend \$17 billion a year on pet food—\$4 billion more than the estimated annual additional total needed to provide basic health and nutrition for everyone in the world.

\$40 billion a year. It is estimated that the additional cost of achieving and maintaining universal access to basic education for all, basic health care for all, reproductive health care for all women, adequate food for all and clean water and safe sewers for all is roughly \$40 billion a year—or less than 4% of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world.

Gospel preached in all the world

The Word gets out!

Bible boom. (*Religion Today*) Bible Societies around the world distributed 20 million Bibles in 1997. The Scriptures were produced in hundreds of languages and distributed in almost every country. The total distributed, including New Testaments and gospel booklets, was 561,633,376, the Bible Society of New Zealand said.

(*Christian Daily News*) In 1999, 24 million complete Bibles (Old and New Testament) were distributed. The Bible or portions of the holy Scriptures are available in 2,233 languages.

New translations. (*Religion Today*) Portions of the Bible have been translated into more than 2,000 of the world's languages, according to the United Bible Societies. In the past year, the entire Bible was translated into eight new languages and the New Testament into 30 new languages. Some 62 other ethnic groups had at least one chapter of the Bible translated into their language for the first time, the UBS said.

The Jesus Film: Forget Titanic. Forget Star Wars and Gone With the Wind. They are small fry compared to the Jesus Film, which has been watched by more than two billion people. More than 40 million people in 120 countries have prayed to become Christians after viewing the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, according to Campus Crusade. The movie has been translated into more than 760 languages and dialects.

Asia. (*Religion Today*) The number of Christians in Asia has doubled in the last 20 years, church analyst Saphir Athyal said. More than 145 million Asians now celebrate Christmas, according to AsiaWeek magazine.

Growth has been dramatic in countries where Christianity encounters opposition. "Persecution [has] resulted in purification of the church and the strengthening of its witness," Athyal said. Three centuries of missionary work in China had produced only a few million Christians before the Communists ordered foreign workers to leave in 1950. After decades of persecution, today there may be as many as 75 million believers, including many in the underground house-church movement. In Vietnam, cell churches are expanding in cities, and rural tribes are turning to Christianity through the work of evangelists and gospel radio programs.

The Antichrist—his government, his image, and his mark

World government

(*CBN*) With nation linked to nation through the economics of trade and the financial markets, and certain regions of the world almost perpetually on the brink of war, some believe there's a real need for world government.

Author Gary Kah has researched groups which support global government. "I believe that we are quite possibly one major world crisis away from world government becoming a reality," says Kah. "I'm talking about either an economic crisis or a military crisis, or possibly a combination of both."

In the *San Francisco Weekly*, Jim Garrison Jr., the head of the Gorbachev Foundation USA, said the planet needs a "Council of Elders" drawn from the highest echelons of politics, science, the arts, and commerce. Garrison predicts that "over the next 20 to 30 years, we are going to end up with world government—it's inevitable."

One Global Authority

[Former] Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott believes the United States may not exist in its current form in the 21st century—because nationhood throughout the world will become obsolete. Talbott has defined, shaped and executed the Clinton administration's foreign policy. He has served at the State Department since the first day of the Clinton presidency.

Just before joining the administration, Talbott wrote in *Time* magazine—in an essay titled "The Birth of the Global Nation"—that he is looking forward to government run by "one global authority." "Here is one optimist's reason for believing unity will prevail. Within the next hundred years ... nationhood as we know it will be obsolete; all states will recognize a single, global authority," Talbott declared in the July 20, 1992 issue of *Time*.

The Invisible World Order

(*Atlantic Unbound*)

On July 17th, 120 member states of the United Nations agreed to create a permanent global war-crimes tribunal, to be called the International Criminal Court. The ICC and other projects like it are signs that the world is getting serious about thinking of itself as a world. As we envision more and more of these global institutions we are simultaneously confronted with the prospect of more and more databases of increasing size and complexity. The time has come to take a step back and ask the question: Are we ready to live in such a place?

Controls and limits on personal freedom—already happening!

(Wired)

The European Union is quietly getting ready to approve legislation that will allow the police to eavesdrop both on Internet conversations and Iridium satellite telephone calls without obtaining court authorization.

The legislation is part of a much wider memorandum of understanding between the E.U., the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Norway, a non-member European nation. That agreement allows authorities to conduct telecom surveillance across international borders, according to a Europol document leaked to members of the European Parliament.

If approved, the agreement would permit real-time, remote monitoring of e-mail, as well as of calls placed on satellite telephone networks such as those maintained by Iridium and Globalstar. Unlike most laws in Europe, the agreement will allow law enforcement to listen in without a court order.

(Joseph Farah, WorldNetDaily)

* Your e-mail communications and phone calls overseas are being intercepted by a global government surveillance system.

* Your cellular phone calls to your elected government officials are being monitored by the same mysterious Echelon program controlled by the U.S. National Security Agency.

* Your international faxes are also being copied and analyzed by this 50-year-old international civilian espionage organization.

(Sunday Times)

Privacy outside the home is almost extinct. The number of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in Britain's public places has now passed 1 million, according to industry figures.

So dense is the network that in many urban areas people may be monitored from the moment they step out of their front door and be kept under observation on their way to work, in the office and even in a restaurant if they choose to dine out. Over the course of a day they could be filmed by 300 cameras.

(Agence France-Presse)

The [British] intelligence service is building a new surveillance center to monitor all e-mails and Internet messages sent and received in Britain. The *Sunday Times* newspaper reported the center would be up and running within a year inside the London headquarters of the counter-intelligence agency MI5.

The British Government will require Internet service providers such as AOL to have "hardwire" links to the new computer facility so that messages can be traced, the *Sunday Times* said. The Government already has the power to tap phone lines linking computers, but the sheer growth of the Internet means it is impossible to read all the material. Having the hardwire link would give MI5 the technical capability to read everything.

"A global information infrastructure—potentially the greatest force since the birth of the automobile—is being forged," says Simon Davies, director-general of Privacy International, a London-based civil liberties group. Simultaneously, notes Mr. Davies, "mass surveillance [by corporations and governments] is developing from Argentina to Zambia."

"This generation has seen a significant increase in media intrusion," says Davies. "New technologies create the potential for invasions of privacy and rights on a scale that could scarcely have been imagined even 20 years ago."

(Simon Davies, Los Angeles Times)

Fifty years ago, a bizarre and terrifying novel went on sale in bookshops across the world. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* caught the imagination of millions, and in the process catapulted Big Brother into the international vocabulary. The phrase soon became shorthand for the power of the state, and it helped entire generations to express their fear of intrusion by authority.

To the digital generation, the all-seeing, all-knowing Big Brother is represented by large computer systems. Each adult in the developed world is located, on average, in 300 databases. As these databases converge with the telecommunications spectrum, nearly everyone becomes entangled in a web of surveillance enveloping everything from our bank accounts to our e-mail. To millions of people, Big Brother looms as a chilling warning about the creation of a surveillance society through information technology.

Superficially, Orwell got it wrong—1984 came and went with many of our freedoms apparently still intact. But a closer reading of the book reveals that we are nearer to Big Brother than we might imagine.

In Orwell's fictional Oceania, a mass of "telescreens," complete with microphones and speakers, watched over every square inch of public and private space. These devices, centrally monitored, began their life as public information systems and ended up policing the morals, thoughts and behavior of all citizens.

Compare this with the present day, where hundreds of thousands of cameras have been placed on buses, trains and elevators. Many people now expect to be routinely filmed from the moment they leave the front gate. Hidden cameras are being installed unhindered in cinemas, alongside roads, in bars, dressing rooms and housing estates. In the United States and Britain, visual surveillance is becoming a fixed component in the design of urban centers, housing areas, public buildings and even throughout the road system.

The Mark of the Beast—financial control, and more!

(The Straits Times)

SINGAPORE—Take out your wallet and count the number of cards you carry, not to mention all the Personal Identification Numbers (PINs) that you have to memorize for every possible transaction. Then there is your passport, driver's license, insurance documents, not to mention details like home and work addresses, phone and fax numbers.

All that information, says BT Laboratories' Peter Cochrane, can be put into a single silicon chip on a smart card. Everything from employment and medical records to financial status can be written into the chip. Add a short-range wireless transmitter-receiver, implant the whole thing under your skin, and you have a personal transponder, just like those in airplanes.

A chip like that can give you total freedom, according to Professor Cochrane. You walk into an airport and clear Customs and Immigrations in minutes because all your personal information will be processed by computers instead of humans. Since all your financial information is also in the chip, you can simply walk up to an ATM machine in any country and withdraw money as and when you need it.

Even grocery-shopping could be easier. Just walk into a store and pick up whatever you want to buy. No more queues at the cashier's counter.

All this could be reality in 10 years time.

Chips get smaller and smarter

By Eric C. Evarts, *The Christian Science Monitor*

First, they appeared in computers. Then they went into clocks, calculators, and coffeemakers. Now they are popping up in credit cards, car windshields, running shoes—and even pets.

Ultimately, say technology experts, they will be embedded in people to track their health, résumés, and whereabouts.

"They" are silicon chips. And as these tiny objects get smaller and smarter, they are bringing about more changes in the way we live. For example:

Britain recently passed a law granting special privileges to foreign pets implanted with silicon ID chips. If the chip indicates a pet's vaccines are up to date, the animal can come into the country without the usual six-month quarantine.

Running shoes equipped with computer chips can adjust the shoes' cushioning based on whether the wearer is running or walking.

Last September, American Express introduced the Blue Card—a credit card with an electronic chip that acts as a checking account for Internet purchases. The chip stores financial data and works much like the magnetic strips on the back of other credit cards. But it holds much more data, lasts longer, and is more secure from thieves.

Travelers on Virginia toll roads can have tolls debited from their bank accounts via chips embedded in windshield stickers.

Ultimately chips could migrate under our skin, though the ethical and humanitarian implications remain unclear. In 1996, Professor Kevin Warwick at the University of Reading in Britain had a chip put in his arm that could unlock doors, turn on lights, and boot up his computer.

All the technology needed for chips to interact directly with humans is already available, says Gene France, a senior fellow at Texas Instruments in Dallas. "All we have to do is figure out how to get them not to be so clunky."

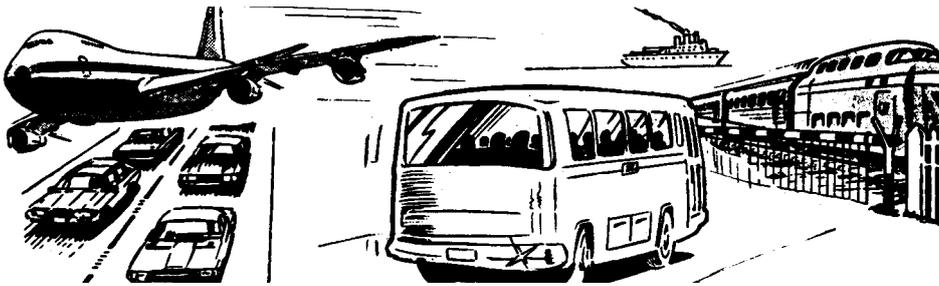
"If I could just download [commands] from my brain, that would be kind of exciting," says Mr. France. "I've always maintained that someday [knowing] calculus will be a matter of sticking your hand on an electrode pad. ... For cellphones, I'd like to be able to just stick this little [chip] in my ear."

Another obstacle is power. Today's batteries are too big, heavy, expensive, and don't last long enough to run embedded chips. "My goal," says France, "is to reduce power requirements so the chips can run off body heat. "Everybody I talk to says ... it'll never happen," he adds. "So I figure it'll be 30 or 40 years."

CHRONOLOGY OF THE FUTURE

From now to the return of Jesus and onwards forever!

1. The Last Days/Signs of the Times



2. The Economic Crash

3. The Rise of the Antichrist



4. Signing of the Covenant



5. Breaking of the Covenant



6. The Great Tribulation



7. The return of Jesus in the clouds: The dead in Christ are raised; the living Christians raptured



8. Celebration in Heaven: The marriage supper of the Lamb and the judgment seat of Christ



9. The wrath of God upon earth

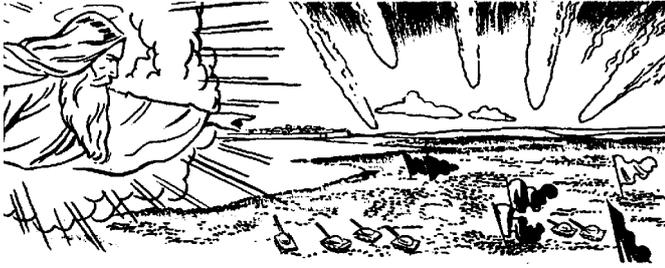


10. The Battle of Armageddon



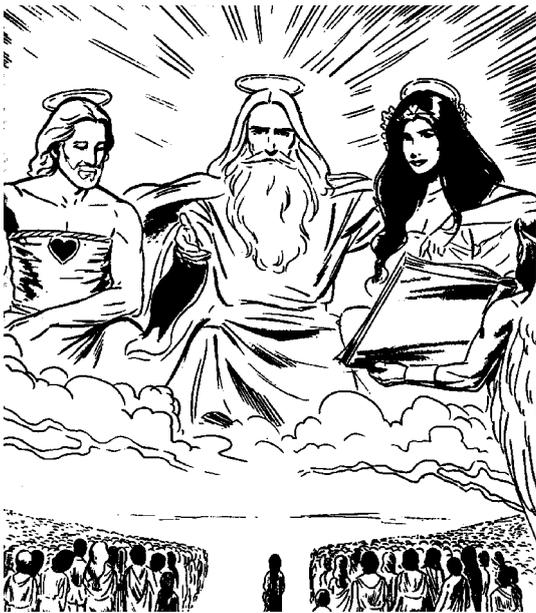
11. The Millennium: 1,000 years of peace—God's Kingdom ruling on earth





12. The Final Test: The Battle of Gog and Magog at the end of the Millennium

13. The Devil cast into the Lake of Fire



14. The Great White Throne Judgment: The dead of all ages raised

15. New Heaven and New Earth

