

Why would some Independent Lutherans, Confessional and Conservative, or Orthodox Lutherans, disbelieve the Signs of the Times?

What would be The Signs of the Times?

Introduction. In the case of our country, every citizen, including every Lutheran layman and clergyman, could and should recognize and be certain with divine certainty that the situation today in our land is that the Almighty will punish this country with a devastating war. See it! Begin thinking in these terms!

Summary. If the people of a land would demonstrate an inner repentance and faith, God will bless them spiritually and materially. On the other hand, if a people would not display such righteousness, the Almighty will punish them. These would be the two signs and their times, respectively.

Text. *Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing him [Jesus] asked that he would show them a sign from Heaven. He answered and said to them, 'When it is evening you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red" and in the morning, "It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening." Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous people look for a sign, but no sign will be given to them except the sign of the prophet Jonah'"* (Matthew 16:1-4).

Context. The Pharisees and the Sadducees had approached Jesus in order to tempt him. In spite of his obvious miracles that demonstrated the glory and power

of his divinity, his enemies demanded that he should produce a miracle which would come down from heaven in the sight of men in order to verify for them his credentials; to demonstrate publicly that the Father in heaven would indeed be pleased with him and with his doctrine and work. In such an important matter as recognizing and confessing the Christ, his opponents demanded to see a divine miracle which would impress their physical senses. In doing so they rejected Scripture's insistence that for divine certainty in spiritual matters only the commands and promises in Scripture are to be the basis. In regards to the fulfillment of those prophecies about the Christ, the Bible wants the observer to look at the historical evidence, then to compare this evidence with what Scripture has to teach on the subject, and then to come to the only conclusion that would have divine certainty to it: that Jesus is the Christ. The opponents of Jesus rejected this biblical procedure. They willfully refused to recognize him as the Christ because of their deliberate predetermined presumption that he could not be the Christ, though there was sufficient evidence, that is, signs or indicators, to that effect. See Matthew 11:5!

In response the Lord answered them by saying, in effect, "You already have the signs by which you could come to a valid conclusion about the identity of the Christ. For example, as Heaven has put signs into the sky by which you could and should come to a correct, assured conclusion about the weather: that it would be either peaceful or stormy, so he also has put moral signs for you to see which are evident: that the Christ and his kingdom have come to you. Why could you not 'discern this time' (Luke 12:57) also? You are competent in the one, but incompetent in the other. You have no excuse."

For example, the point at issue in this incident involving the Lord and his opponents is that his opponents had rejected the plain evidence of his Messiahship, giving as their justification the lack of a proper sign from Heaven, such as a miracle which Moses, Elijah, or God would have done in the Old Testament. Just the same, they already had sufficient indicators from his gospel preaching and his miracles of mercy, the same things to which the Lord had pointed on another occasion after men, sincerely and in good faith, had asked the Lord for indicators of his Messiahship (Matthew 11:5). Thus the problem lay with the Pharisees' and Sadducees' refusal to acknowledge the obvious evidence. As a result, the Lord demonstrated how the Pharisees and the Sadducees willingly, without prejudice or doubt, accepted the indicators of weather, yet they hypocritically rejected with a stubborn prejudice the plain indicators about the Christ.

To be sure, in his weather analogy the Lord included more than just the point which was in controversy, namely, the rejection by his opponents of the evidence which indicated the Messiahship of Jesus.

For instance, the Lord could have chosen an analogy that covered only the matter of the rejection of the clear evidence of the Christ. That is, he could have chosen a parable similar to that of the five foolish virgins or the rich man (Matthew 25:1-13; Luke 16:19-31) who, like his present enemies, acted foolishly or wickedly and missed out on a great spiritual benefit: salvation.

However, the Lord consciously chose a different analogy which contained the consequences of a positive or of a negative appreciation of his gospel gift. That is to say, his weather analogy covered two matters, each one having its own cause and effect.

Definition. The editors of the various Greek-English lexicons do not elaborate on the meaning of the Greek word which is used in Matthew 16, but simply use the English word "sign" to define it. In turn, the English dictionaries give many definitions for the use of the English word "sign," however. One even lists fourteen. Which definition did the Lord mean?

Considering his references to the weather, in which the sky would give reliable evidence of what kind of weather there would be, the same definition, therefore, would have to hold true for the Lord's more critical moral comparison. Thus the meaning of "sign" as used in Matthew 16 could and should be this one which Noah Webster supplies: "Any appearance or event which indicates the approach of something else" (*Noah Webster's First Edition of an American Dictionary of the English Language*, Facsimile of the 1828 edition [San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1999], no page).

The Lord also uses the plural form "times," referring to two different times. From the context, the term "time" would refer to "at this time," "currently," or "from this time onward."

Hence "the signs of the times" is an expression used by the Son of God to refer to two events.

First of all, as the red sunset (Matthew 16:2) will bring good times, so the pious indicators described in 2nd Chronicles 7:14 or in Jonah 3:4-10 will bring God's blessing of peace. On the other hand, as the red sunrise will bring stormy times (Matthew 16:3), so any national rejection of Christ, either of his indicators (Matthew 11:5), or of his gospel, will bring down the penalty of a God-sent annihilating war (Exodus 15:3; Judges 5:8; Psalm 9:17; Isaiah 60:12; Luke 19:41-44).

That is to say, the “sign” of growing gospel belief among the citizens of a country, alternately called “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28), a Reformation, or a golden age in the church, is an indicator that at that “time” God will bless that people, not only spiritually, but materially as well – especially with peace. On the other hand, under the opposite conditions, when it is plain and evident that a rejection of gospel preaching by the citizens of a land is taking place, described alternately as a “falling away” (2nd Thessalonians 2:3), a “backsliding” (Jeremiah 3:12), a “forsaking” (Jeremiah 2:13), a “rejection of the counsel of God for themselves” (Luke 7:30), or as “being offended” (Matthew 13:21, 57), this is a “sign” that God will punish that country from that “time” onward with an annihilating war.

The threat of this divine penalty is a frequent subject brought up not only throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Prophets, but in the New Testament as well, such as in Luke 19:41-44, and in such parables as Matthew 21:33-41 and Matthew 22:1-14.

Biblical summary. These two cases dealing with the two different responses of God toward men are summarized in the following passages. “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2nd Chronicles 7:14). “If you would seek him, he will be found by you; but if you would forsake him, he will forsake you” (2nd Chronicles 15:2). “The nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined” (Isaiah 60:12). “All nations that forget God will be turned into hell” (Psalm 9:17).

The latter sign is the one to which the Almighty refers in the text after he condemns his enemies for their failure to recognize its forecast of the awful punishment of national disaster which would follow as a consequence. The actual punishment of total war upon that whole nation would occur less than forty years later in 70 A.D.

Application. This is what you could and should remember whenever you would hear the biblical phrase “the signs of the times.” As this expression could and should be applied to America, it would mean that a forecast of total war upon the whole nation could and should be plain to see. The sign, or evidence of this, would consist of the ongoing unbelieving testimonies from our citizens’ own mouths, and from their unbelieving behavior. As the second sign of the time could and should have been recognized by his nation in Jesus’ day, especially by the religiously-educated clergy and laity, so the second sign of the time – a national devastation by war – could and should be recognized, confessed, and preached at least by the American Christian clergy and laity today who claim to have a biblical knowledge of God’s will. Yet they are just as blind to the second sign of the time as the Pharisees and the Sadducees were in their day. Their response today has been silence, for they are withholding judgment on the matter until after war would break out. In other words, “Show me God’s war first, then I will believe it!” What an indictment of American Christendom! Is it any wonder that “the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (1st Peter 4:17) which could and should know better?

To be sure, this nation is neither maintaining nor returning to the first sign of the time, that is, a golden age of repentance and gospel belief with God’s accompanying

blessing of peace. On the contrary, America has fallen away from its golden age of Christianity. The people of our land are now in the process of shaking off the shackles, as they would consider them (Psalm 107:14), of every last biblical command and promise.

Divine assurance. The divine assurance which could and should be derived from the signs of the times is to be gotten from God's threats and promises. See again 2nd Chronicles 7:14, Isaiah 60:12, and Psalm 9:17! Just the same, since the Bible states that "the anger of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18)... who, knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are worthy of death" (Romans 1:32), and that all men have a conscience and the law of God written in their hearts (Romans 2:14-15), everyone is included under this responsibility to recognize and to be assured that in the current state of "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," in America, God will punish.

Therefore, in the case of our country, every citizen could and should recognize and be certain that the situation today in our land is that of the second sign of the time. As a result, they could and should be certain with divine certainty that the Almighty will punish this country with a devastating war.

See it! Begin to think in these terms now!

What could and should you do? Do not wait for the pulpits or the church hierarchy to tell you what to do! They see no war coming. They walk by sight, not by faith. That is, willfully they refuse to see the current sign of the time. Indeed, the exceeding danger about this sort of sign of the time, which is the same kind about which the Almighty has warned (Matthew 16:1-3), is that you must

act now to double your efforts to repent, to believe, to pray for deliverance, and to prepare. If you would wait until you could see it ("Show me!"), it will be too late.

Act on your own! Resolve to make the intent to do so with God's help! Homeschool, and then also homechurch if it would be necessary! This is a time when your family's lives and eternal souls are in serious jeopardy. You have a duty to God to protect them.