“You know how to discern the appearance of the sky; why are you unable to discern the signs of the times.”

(Matthew 16:3)

By DON E STANTON

There was a small boy living in Canada with his parents. His name was Jamie. His father was a business man, who sometimes had to go on extensive business trips.

One day the father said to his son, “Jamie, Daddy has to go away for some work. You will be here with Mummy, and I want you to be a good boy. I will come back soon, and will be with you again. So don’t worry.”

Jamie looked puzzled. He was just a toddler. He was used to his Daddy going away every morning, and returning in the evening. He had also experienced his father going for two or three days.

Jamie clutched his father, and asked, “Daddy, when you come back?”

The man slowly replied, “Jamie, I will be away for one month – that is thirty days.”
The little boy looked puzzled. “But Daddy, when you come back?”

The father was now puzzled. How to give the child an idea of how long a month is? He looked through the window. Suddenly, the answer clicked in his mind.

“Jamie, come … come outside.” He took the boy in his arms, and went into the front garden.

“Jamie, see that tree … it has many green leaves … after some days you will see the leaves become yellow. Then you will see some leaves drop to the ground. When you see the yellow leaves drop, you will know that I am coming very soon.”

The next day the father kissed his wife and son goodbye, and went on his journey.

Jamie missed his Daddy very much, and every day he ran out to see the tree in the front garden. After a couple of weeks he saw that some leaves had become a little yellow. Then in the following days, as many leaves changed colour, Jamie became excited.

One day Jamie ran out to the garden and discovered a leaf on the ground. He was so excited. He grabbed the leaf and ran inside. “Mummy, Mummy! Look, leaf fall down. Daddy coming soon.”

The next day more leaves had fallen, and Jamie grew more excited.

“My Daddy’s coming!”

And sure enough, his father returned the very same day.

Jamie could see the sign. He could see the evidence pointing to his father's imminent return.

**DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

WHEN the religious leaders of His time asked Y’shua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) to show them a sign from heaven, He answered them.

“When it is evening, you say, ‘it will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘it will be bad weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, why are you unable to discern the signs of the times?” (Matthew 16:2-3)

The Messiah went on to say that that no sign would be given to that generation except the sign of Jonah.” Earlier He had spoken of this sign …

“An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea-monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth’. (Matthew 12:39-40)
The Messiah gave a second sign about His death and resurrection on another occasion:

“Destroy this temple,” He said, “and in three days I will raise it up again.”

Then the Jews replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (John 2:19-21)

So the Messiah’s resurrection was the sign given to the first century generation - it was to happen in their time. But Y’shua indicated that there would be many specific signs given to the generation living at the endtimes – the period prior to His return – the Second Coming.

Those prophetic signs are like the falling leaves in our parable.

Jamie knew the falling leaves were signs of his Daddy’s return. And my reader, we should be able to see the leaves falling all around us – many significant current events – all pointing to the imminent return of Y’shua the Messiah.

**A VISUAL ILLUSTRATION**

Recently I prepared a visual demonstration to use in teaching this subject of the imminent return. I thought the visual would get the attention of children, but I found it got the attention of adults even more.

I want to share some of the details with you, as I believe many of my readers may like to prepare a similar visual to help them present the message to their people – their children, friends and neighbours.

1. I drew a leaf on a piece of cardboard about 5” x 8”. Then I cut around the shape of the leaf.
2. I drew some ribs on the leaf to make it look more real. (See design at top of the chapter)
3. Then I bought several sheets of green, blue and yellow construction card which I cut into thirty 5” x 8” pieces.
4. On my computer I prepared a list of 30 signs along with the Biblical references, in large type, and printed out the sheet. I cut them into individual pieces ready to stick on the back of the leaves. This much I completed in Sept., on the day before I left for ministry in India.
5. On my journey, I had a long transit time at Singapore airport. After a rest, I still had 6 hours to fill in, so I utilized the time working on my leaves. I traced the outline of my original leaf onto each of the 30 pieces of card. Then with a pencil drew the ribs on the leaves, and with a thick green felt pen, I drew a ¼” border on the outer edges of the leaves, and I drew the ribs again with blue and green pens.
6. I had a small glue stick with me, so I stuck a sign and reference to the back of each leaf.

I could not cut out the leaves, though, because you are not allowed to carry scissors in your hand luggage on the planes these days. But my six hours of spare time was completely taken up with designing the visual.

The next day, in New Delhi, I cut around the leaves, and touched up the edges and designs; and my visual was almost complete.

In my baggage I had a heap of news items and documents which were related to various signs. So I had to go through these to choose the right “evidence” to support my contention that these signs are indeed very relevant. My first message was the very next day.
Delivering the Message

At the service in New Delhi I announced the subject – The Imminent Return of Jesus the Messiah. I explained the Rapture, and how the Saviour would return to catch His people up to the Father’s House …

“Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s House are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you, for I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, so that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:1-3)

“For the Master Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. Then the dead in Christ - those who died in union with the Messiah - shall rise first. Then we, the living believers who remain, will simultaneously be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Master in the air. And so we will be with the Master for ever. Therefore comfort and encourage one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

I turned also to Luke 21 – the Saviour’s prophetic message on the endtimes, and read the following verses.

“Then He said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be mighty and violent earthquakes in various places, and plagues, (pestilences, malignant, contagious or infectious diseases, and deadly, devastating epidemics), and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.’

“And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and upon earth despair among nations, with perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men’s hearts will faint from terror, being apprehensive of what is coming upon the world; for the very powers of the heavens will be shaken.

“Then will they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:10-11. 25-28)

I went on to explain that we are seeing signs of the Climax of the Age happening all around us – every day. But many people do not see the significance of current events because they do not know the Biblical prophecies – or have forgotten them. I explained, we must look behind the leaf – behind the current events - and see the prophecy.

As I began to tell the people the parable of the falling leaves, I pulled out a green and a yellow leaf to illustrate Jamie’s leaves.

Then I went on to liken current events to falling leaves. I told the people I had a pack of 30 leaves, and then I pulled out one, and showed them the prophecy on the back. “Look behind the leaf,” I said, “and you will see the prophecy; look behind the current events and see the prophecy.”

The first leaf was earthquakes.

I quoted the prophecy we had read in Luke 21:10, and then referred to some of the documents I had about earthquakes. I told of some major earthquakes that had taken place that very week -

“Earthquakes are a definite sign of the times,” I said, letting the leaf drop to the floor.

After choosing other leaves, and giving details of the signs, I would hold up the leaf, and ask, “Shall I let it fall?” The people would agree. And another leaf would fall to the floor.

Now, of course, to talk about 30 signs would take a couple of hours, so I concentrated only on some of them, and then simply mentioned the rest of the signs very briefly.

A SUGGESTION

One suggestion for any who decide to make and use this visual in a church service, youth group or Sunday School: you may be able to spread the message over a number of weeks, using four or five signs each week? You could make it into a type of serial, if you like.

Or you might like to make a weekly 5-minute feature using just one sign – using a news item of something significant that has happened during the week. “This week’s ‘Signs of the Times’.”

Or you may be able to use “leaves” as a small feature in the church news sheet.

Now I trust the above has whetted your curiosity to know the signs on the rest of my 30 leaves pointing to the Saviour’s imminent return. Well, I have 50 leaves in this book. So here they fall!

50 FALLING LEAVES

NOT only do the following signs indicate that we are living in the last days; they also give us a foretaste of the things that are to come upon the whole world during the Great Tribulation.

The news reports and examples that I have given are just a sampling of what is happening out there. I have tried to use news that is relevant and recent. “Bigger and better” examples could be found, no doubt, with more reading and research. And I am sure that you also, could supply news items to illustrate these 50 leaves.

I encourage you to maintain a file of relevant and important news reports for your own use.

SCOFFERS AND MOCKERS

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking and following after their own evil desires; and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers died, everything goes on just as it has since the beginning of creation’.” (2 Peter 3:3-4)

THE world scoffs at the possibility of the Messiah literally descending from heaven with a shout, in power and great glory, to catch His people away from this doomed world. They may be forgiven! But today, many of the mockers are within the Christian church itself. No doubt you have heard someone say:

“Oh yeh! They were talking about the imminent second coming when my grandfather was a kid. But still Christ has not come!” Their tone indicates that they don’t really expect the Lord to come at any time.

Even some Christian teachers scoff about the doctrine of the Rapture. “That’s escapism,” they say. “Forget the Rapture. We must be busy building the kingdom of God.”
A classic example of Christian indifference and unbelief was the case of a pastor in a city in India where I lived. After some young Christians had spoken to him excitedly about the imminent return of the Messiah, the pastor said, “Let Him come! Let Him come. We are not bothered!”

This is a sign in itself. Many Christians scoff - they are not looking for the Saviour’s return. And the majority of Christians, starved of Second Coming teaching as many of them are, seem to live as though the Master will never return.

But … “… every one who has this Hope fixed on Him, purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 John 3:3)

Scoffing is our first leaf - a very significant sign of the times!

TO BE CONTINUED