

I have used this illustration before... but it bears repeating.

The Morgan sea gypsies are a small tribe of 181 fishermen who spend much of the year on their boats... fishing in the Andaman Sea from India to Indonesia and back to Thailand. During the month of December... every year... though... they live in shelters on the beaches of Thailand.

So in December 2004... hours just before the killer Tsunami crashed ashore... the Morgan sea gypsies were living on those beaches. They were in harm's way and would have likely all perished—had they not listened to their elders.

For generations... the elders of the tribe had passed along one piece of wisdom. The tribe's 65-year-old village chief Sar-mao Kath-alay says...
“The elders told us that if the water recedes fast it will reappear in the same quantity in which it disappeared.”

And that is exactly what happened. ... The sea drained quickly from the beach... leaving stranded fish flopping on the shore. ... How easy it would have been for those who live off of the sea to run down where the water had been minutes ago... and fill every basket available with fish.

Some people did *just that* ... in other areas of South Thailand. ... Not the Morgan sea gypsies. ... When the water receded from the beach... the tribal chief ordered every one of the 181 tribal members... to run to a temple in the mountains of South Surin Island. ... When the waters crashed ashore... the 181 sea gypsies were safe on high ground.

Knowing the signs... what to look for... and how to interpret them... can be a good thing... especially when it comes to Bible prophecy.

Understanding the signs is one of the biggest fixations on people's minds... whenever we engage in a study of the Book of Revelation. ... That is not a **bad** thing... unless it stays in the realm of head knowledge... (satisfying a curiosity). My prayer for this study... is that it has been (and will continue) to strengthen your trust in God's Word... strengthen your love for Jesus... and build an anticipation for the Lord's return.

A question that is asked so many times at prophetic conferences is... "*Are we living in the last days?*" ... And the answer is definitely "yes" ... especially when the term "Last Days" is defined the way that my professors in seminary defined it. They taught that the "Last Days" began at Pentecost – when the church was born... and will continue until we are raptured off this earth. (This is the period of time that we have been studying in recent weeks in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.) By that definition... no one can doubt that these are the last days.

These days... while the church is still here on earth are (indeed) the last days... because as you well know... the history of mankind... and the history of God dealing with His people goes much further back in time (before the church was born.) ... We are in the Last Days... as opposed to the days of the law and the prophets... when for thousands of years... God regulated His people by their obedience to the Law He handed down through Moses... ... And (before that) the days of the promise... when all that God's people had (to live their lives by)... was the promises God made to Abraham. Before that... one's relationship with God was regulated by human consciousness... and it goes back even further... all the way to the

regulating standard of “*don’t eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.*” ... The church age – this period of grace – are the last days.

Now... in our study of chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation... (the letters to the seven churches)... we have been noticing that these chapters have described the church age in it’s entirety – from Pentecost... to the time when the church will be taken off this earth. And as we concluded last week with the seventh and final letter... (the letter to the church at Laodicea)... it describes the very last period of church history... the age that we are currently living in... right now. This makes me willing to declare... that we are now living in the last... of the last days.

My friend... Jim Cecy... says... “*These are not the last days, my friend. These are the very last seconds!*”

But what if I were to tell you... that the Great Tribulation is not imminent...?

It is true! ... I believe the Great Tribulation is NOT something that can happen at any moment now. You may say... “*Huh? ... Would you please make up your mind... Pastor...? ... Didn’t you just get finished saying that we are living in the last of the last days...? So how can you not believe that the Great Tribulation is just about to occur...?*”

I say that... because Scripture declares that there are a few things that must happen... (they must all line up)... before the Great Tribulation will occur. And some of these things have not yet come into play. Some have... but there are a few more that we must see... before we can say that the Great Tribulation is imminent... (That it is something we should all be looking for right now.)

Now... please notice that I am saying THE GREAT **TRIBULATION**... not the **RAPTURE**... THE GREAT TRIBULATION still needs a few things to fall into place. You see... I believe that the RAPTURE (when the church is taken off the earth)... can... and is about to happen at any moment... and then the other prerequisites can happen... sometime (probably soon) after we are gone.

But as I said... several of these things have already (in recent years) happened... which tells me that we are ever so close to the RAPTURE... and the remaining prerequisite events will likely occur closely after it.

Today... we are going to look at the events that have already fallen into place... and next week we will look at those that we are still waiting for. This morning will be turning to several passages of Scripture... outside of the Book of Revelation... which I believe fill-in some of the details between Revelation chapters 2 and 3... and the beginning of Revelation chapter 4. We finished chapter 3 last week... So let's get a perspective of the events... before the things we will read about... in Revelation chapter 4.

Have I confused you yet...? We are waiting for the rapture (which can happen at any moment.) And the events we will study these next two weeks... show how close we are to it... because some of the events leading up to the **Great Tribulation** are already being fulfilled... and seeing how close we are to the tribulation... the event that happens BEFORE it...(the rapture) is even closer.

Now... before we proceed... lets lay a few ground rules... so that we can avoid some common mistakes... which are often made. ... People want to be like the Sea Gypsies... who knew how to read and interpret the signs

that surrounded them. But when they attempt this... they will interpret some present day crisis... on how it affects the **United States** – as if we are the center of God’s prophecy. We are NOT! In most cases... it is Israel. This is one of the many problems that I had with Jonathan Cahn’s recent best-selling book “The Harbinger.” ... True determination of where history is moving prophetically... is not how world events affect the United States – but how they impact Jewish history. Israel is God’s timepiece!

Second – please avoid the common practice of interpreting prophecy by current news stories... unless the parallel fits perfectly. You don’t need to force-feed it. There are many “newspaper exegetes” today... who spend a lot of time and effort trying to fit today’s events into areas of fulfilled prophecy. Prophecy must be determined from Scripture... and then applied to current events – not the other way around. We are not to find possible similarities of current events... and then try to force them onto the pages of Scripture. ... We look so foolish in doing that... don’t we?

“Well, you know... Henry Kissinger fits the description of the Anti-Christ...” (And we have heard this about every world leader after him.)

“The description of the locusts in Revelation 9 seem like modern day attack helicopters. John had never seen a helicopter... he only had what he knew to try to describe them...”

Third – We can have convictions about our interpretation of the apocalyptic passages of Scripture... but without also maintaining humility... we betray the fact that God’s Word has not produced its intended result. (How sad that we find so many heated arguments over interpretations of end time events.)

If we disagree with one another... let's agree to allow humility to shine through it. (All of what I am about to present today... I give as my best understanding. If any of it causes you to scratch your head and say... "*Well... I just don't know...*" – But at the same time... you get a picture that God is on His throne working all things according to His plan... then I've done my job.) ... God sovereignly controls all of the world events – and He sovereignly controls all the events of my personal life. He is someone that I can trust. My life needs to be aligned with Him. ... We don't have to agree on all the details – but this much we should... Jesus is coming back... and the time is very short!

Now... let's get started. ... I ask that you turn with me to the Olivet Discourse... which Jesus had with His disciples...Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:1-8

The disciples were fascinated by the magnificence and beauty of the Temple in Jerusalem. ... Jesus disrupts their marvelling and tells them how temporary it is... (that it will be completely destroyed.) ... Boy! Talk about a bubble burst! ... What Jesus foretold to His disciples happened in 70 a.d. – when the Roman General Titus came and put down a Jewish rebellion... destroyed the Temple... and scattered the Jews all over the Empire. They were never to return as a nation until 1948.

But Jesus' bubble-bursting prophecy aroused three questions in their minds. 1) "When will these things be?" (the destruction of the Temple) ... 2) "What shall be the sign of Your coming?" (When will the second coming be?) ... 3) "What are the signs of the end of the age?"

Now... please remember how prophecy works. Most often there is an immediate fulfillment within the generation that the prophecy was first spoken... and then a later fulfillment... many years later. Jesus did not answer them by saying... *“In 40 years... Titus will destroy the Temple and scatter the Jews...”* ... Instead He spoke of the later fulfillment (at least two thousand years down the road.) He spoke of “the signs of the end of the age.” Jesus’ prophecy spoke of two events... but He answered their question by talking about the second one. The disciples probably thought that they were one and the same thing.

Jesus answered them first negatively... and then positively. Negatively – He told them what would NOT be the sign that the end of the age has begun. Verse 4-6 contain the negative answer.

Matthew 24:4-6

Neither of these things means that the end of the age has begun... There are going to be false messiahs who rise up... and there are going to be wars in various parts of the world. These are general characteristics that will be true of the present church age. And there have been false messiahs and wars... all through the church age. ... But the positive side is given to us in verses 7-8.

Matthew 24:7-8

Instead of various wars in sections around the globe... there will be a massive war (distinguishable from all the others)... of nations and kingdoms going against each other. And coupled to this event... there will be notable famines and notable earthquakes. When this happens... you

can start your countdown... (know that the birth pangs of the end of the age have begun.)

As Jesus answered the question of His disciples... how would they have understood the phrase “*nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom*”?

Well it turns out that we might be able to know how they understood it... because the rabbis from Jesus’ day had been writing about this Jewish idiom.

“If you shall see the kingdom rising against each other in turn, then give heed and note the footsteps of the Messiah.”

- Bereshit Rabbah

“At that time wars shall be stirred up in the world, Nation will be against nation, and city against city; much distress shall be renewed against the enemies of the Israelites.”

- Zohar Chadash

Jesus affirmed what the rabbis had written... that there would be a significant sign that is distinguishable massive world wars involving several nations.

The first time that such a world-wide conflict occurred was 1914-1918 with World War I. ... Most historians agree that World War II was actually a continuation of World War I. ... But perhaps what is most notable... is the impact that both of these had on Jewish history. (Remember – we must keep Israel in the center... as we interpret current events with prophecy.) One of the results of World War I was the inception of the Zionist Movement (the effort to return the Land of Palestine to the Jews.) The

negotiations after the second world war made it possible for the establishment of the state of Israel.

I believe that the two world wars signal the beginning of the birth pangs... and it is reinforced by the second part of the positive signs that Jesus spoke about at the Olivet Discourse... famines and earthquakes. First – the famines.

During the war years of 1918-1919, a pestilence killed 23 million people. In 1920, the Great Chinese Famine occurred, followed by the Great Russian Famine in 1921. (Dave Rieker tells of his family coming to America because of the Russian famine.)

But perhaps the earthquake factor is more fascinating. It is... for sure more controversial.

I did some research this week... looking at the US Geological Survey web site... and others. My question was what yours would probably be: “*Are we experiencing more earthquakes today, than ever before in recorded history?*”

I found many articles that went both ways. Some of the difficulty to answer our question from the available data... lies in the fact that the earthquake trackers have switched measurements. They no longer use the Richter Scale... which they only began to use in the 1930's... when it was invented. ... And then many articles showed a *bias* in the answer they gave. For example... some appear to want to raise an alarm about global warming and were claiming “*Yes, we see an increase of earthquakes, and man-made global warming is the cause...*”

I think that it is because the US Geological Survey now uses a different measurement... but today... you can only get their data extending back to the year 2000... from their web site. Then they publish articles that answer our question – but the data they use... comes from a very limited analysis of data that only goes as far back as 2000. They answer our question saying... *“No. ... There is no evidence for an increasing trend of earthquakes... because we see some years where there are more earthquakes... but the very next year shows fewer...”* - But limiting their analysis to only the past 16 years leaves me unsatisfied with our government scientists' conclusion.

Fortunately I found some other web sites that still show the data from the US Geological studies (which they no longer publish on their web site.) Here is what I found.

Based on records kept since 1900... the United States Geological Survey (USGS) expects a yearly total of about 17-20 major earthquakes (those that measure 7.0 to 7.9 on the Richter Scale) and less than **one** great earthquake (8.0 or more on the Richter Scale).

That is the norm – *if we ignore the past eight years.* ... In the past eight years or so... there were about 14 great earthquakes (of 8.0 or more). This nearly doubles the 'norm' of *less than one* each year. In 2014 we had a very unusual 4 great earthquakes... while some years had none. (So... do you see how one researcher can answer our question about the increasing frequency of earthquakes with a yes... and the next one with a no...?)

Looking far enough into the past makes a difference... and so does qualifying our question. ... Are we talking ALL earthquakes... or just the

great earthquakes...? ...8.0 and above) ... SO... if we change the question slightly... to the question we should have asked in the first place... If we ask: *Is the frequency of GREAT earthquakes (8.0 or more) on the rise?* – The answer is a simple – “yes!” (And it is the great earthquakes that make for a recognizable sign.)

But here is something else that you might think is significant. ... Every year fluctuates in the number of all earthquakes... but there are three periods of the greatest increases of earthquakes... 1) the early 1900's... 2) around 1940... and 3) in recent years. Does anyone recall what occurred in close proximity to the early 1900's and what was happening in 1940...? - World War I and World War II. (America didn't enter it until 1941... but it was already raging and Jews were being exterminated.)

From the Mount of Olives... Jesus has instructed you and I to start the countdown. The birth pangs for the end of the ages have begun. World Wars I and II coupled with famines and earthquakes has set everything in motion. And there is something else that has occurred which is part of the countdown... ... the re-establishment of Israel.

In 70 a.d. the Temple was destroyed... and the Jewish people were scattered all over the globe. ... But even before Christ's time... several Old Testament prophecies spoke of a world-wide re-gathering of Jews... back to Israel. Before the tribulation can occur... there needs to be a world-wide re-gathering of Jews to Israel... from their scattering in 70 a.d. – and when not one stone of the Temple was left on top of another.

Ezekiel 20:33-38

We need to remind ourselves of Israel's exodus from Egypt... with Moses... because Ezekiel has drawn a clear parallel with it. God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt... and into the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. ... God's purpose was two-fold: 1st) they were to receive the Law from Moses, and 2nd) they were to build a Tabernacle through which they would practice the Law. But because of their rebellion at the Oasis of Kadesh Barnea... which was on the boarder to the Promised Land... God entered into judgment with His people. They now faced a period of 40 years of wandering around in the desert... until everyone over the age of 20... except Joshua and Caleb died off. Now all of this sets the stage for Ezekiel's prophecy.

Here Ezekiel prophesies that God will re-gather His people from all over the world (not just one place – like the Land of Egypt.) In verse 34 of our passage in Ezekiel... it is made known that just like the Exodus from Egypt... this re-gathering to Israel would be out from wrathful circumstances. In Egypt God's wrath was displayed through the ten plagues on Egypt. They came out of a wrathful situation... and so will the re-gathering... that Ezekiel prophesied.

The events of the Nazi Holocaust... I think... qualifies as a wrathful condition... where 23 million Jews were exterminated. And... by the way... because of the Nazi Holocaust... the rest of the world had great sympathy for the Jewish people... and world sympathies set the stage... making it possible for the Jews to have their own homeland... and re-gather to Israel. But the Israelite re-gathering was not only out from wrathful circumstances. The rest of the prophecy is all about a severe judgment that God would bring on them. They were saved out of wrath... and they were saved unto

wrath. ... Ezekiel describes their re-gathering in unbelief... out of wrath and for wrath.

Ezekiel 20:35-37

They certainly are not willing for God to be their King... are they? They are re-gathered in unbelief... but they are regathered for a coming judgment... where God will purge them of the rebels among them. Those who remain after the purging will turn to the Lord and He will bring them into a bond of a covenant with Himself.

This purging is the Tribulation. It is meant to purge Israel... and to bring them back under God's Kingship. Folks... the Tribulation is all about God bringing His people back to Himself. (We can argue until the cows come home... whether or not the church will go through the tribulation. We will certainly deal with that question later... But right now... we should all agree that the tribulation is primarily for the Jews.) Ezekiel prophesied their re-gathering in unbelief... from wrath and for wrath... to lead them to a national salvation. This re-gathering began shortly after World War II – which helped make it happen.

Ezekiel has more to declare about this first re-gathering... He makes it clear that the purpose is to bring national salvation to them.

Ezekiel 22:17-22

Ezekiel 36:22-24

God has re-gathered Israel. There has been only one time in Israel's long history... where they have been re-gathered to Israel from all over the world. They re-gathered after being enslaved to Babylon... but this does

not qualify as a world-wide re-gathering... they came from only one area... not from the four corners of the earth. Only what we have just seen transpire – in 1948... has this ever happened... and it has materialized in the exact manner that Ezekiel described – unbelieving... out of wrath and for wrath.

When you look at the present Jewish State called “Israel” today... the vast majority are unbelievers in the Messiah. In fact... of the 5.1 million Jews in the land today... only about 4 to 5 thousand believe in Orthodox Judaism. The vast majority of its citizens are either agnostic or athiests. God has re-gathered His stubborn people for the judgment of the Tribulation. The whole world will experience it. Everyone... left behind from the rapture... in the whole world will be judged... but Israel is God’s focus. He will be bringing His people back to Himself... as He displays to the entire world Who He is.

The time is close. It is very close. But there are few more things that need to happen which we will continue with... in our study... next week. And as I said before... those things can very well happen AFTER the rapture. Jesus could return for His church at any moment. As close as we are to the Tribulation – I believe we are even closer to the Rapture. Are you ready...?

Prophecy not only shows us how close we are – It also shows how real all of this is. God has His plan that He is working perfectly. We are not playing religious games, here...

Give your life (whole-heartedly) to Jesus. Serve Him in His kingdom now – before it is too late. Do not show the stubbornness that the tribulation is meant to judge... and will judge... through much pain and suffering.