

# Leading Indicators for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming

*3-Year Bible Reading Plan*

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Well, tonight, let me encourage you to open up to the book of Revelation beginning in chapter 9. Now I know that as we come to the end of our Bible reading plan, that on Sunday mornings we have been dealing with some of what we call the parenthetical chapters, that is that fancy word that means out of the chronology of. A couple of Sunday mornings ago we were in chapter 7 where we saw that scene in heaven where it says that from all people and all nations and all tongues, there were those that were before the throne of God, those that had been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. This morning, we dealt with chapter 12 where it talks about kind of this historical picture of spiritual warfare, that the enemy has always desired to destroy Jesus Christ and anyone who was representative of him.

Well, tonight, because I like to kind of take the liberty on Sunday evenings, we're just going to go there because when you talk about the book of Revelation and all the seals and all the judgments and the destructions, one of the great questions that we're so desirous to talk about but we're so apprehensive is the "when." Now I'm not talking about setting a date, I'm not talking about doing it as those that have done in times past where they set a particular date and that date has come and gone and discredited them. I'm not talking about date-setting but I am talking about tonight is there a way that you and I can look at the book of Revelation maybe from our perspective and see that we do have a unique perspective of saying that the days are short. Tonight, I want to look at what I call leading indicators for the second coming.

Now I want to begin with a statement that has somewhat become synonymous with me when it comes to end time events. It's somewhat lengthy but you've heard it before. There is nothing that has to happen before Jesus Christ comes back for us, there are a whole lot of things that have to happen before Jesus comes back with us. Some of the things that have to happen before Jesus comes back with us may, in fact, happen before he comes back for us. Now let me unpack that briefly. There is no sign, prophecy or any of such nature that has to "be fulfilled" before the Lord calls us out, those who are dead in Christ and alive in Christ, to be with him. However when you look at the actual physical return of Jesus Christ, that literal second coming that is pictured in chapter 19, there are as few as 300 and as many as 800 potential prophecies that have to be fulfilled. I know what some of you are thinking, 300, 800, that's a pretty large window of opportunity. Well, a

lot of these prophetic passages have variance of intricacies with them. Some people take the prophecy as a whole, some of them want to divide the different aspects thereof, but can we all agree at a minimum of 300 is a significant number considering the first coming was only 48. A whole lot of things have to occur.

Now tonight, we're not going to talk about fulfilled prophecy, we're not going to talk about signs and wonders, but I do want to take you to three very particular passages in the book of Revelation that for the majority of Christianity, for the majority of the time period since the tomb was discovered to be empty, most Christians either looked at these passages and said there's no way it can happen that way or it must be metaphorical. In other words, we understand what the Lord gave John on the island of Patmos but maybe it was figurative, maybe it was, you know, just an exaggeration, maybe it was just using imagery and symbol. We're going to see tonight that there are things that are written in the book of Revelation that for over 1,900 years well-meaning, born again believers thought there's no way it could actually happen like that, and you and I are living today in a world where it would be commonplace. And the reason I want to call this leading indicators is because if these things that are becoming a reality in our world today had not been for over 1,900 years, it gives us reason to truly believe that we are in the proverbial last days.

I want to begin in chapter 9. We're going to go into three passages tonight. I want to deal with the population concerns. Now I know there are those who claim that we have an overpopulation of the earth. I dare not say that because they haven't been to South Dakota lately, there's plenty of space to put a lot of people. But nonetheless, in the book of Revelation 9 we have the sixth trumpet judgment. Now just as an aside because we're in the book of Revelation, there are three series of judgments in Revelation: there are the famous seven seals, there are the seven trumpets and there are seven vials. Now there are two different approaches to these judgments. There are some people, dear friends of mine, who believe that it's the same seven judgments told from three different perspectives, that it's almost a more intensive description thereof. And there are others, like myself, that believe that the seventh seal actually opens up the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet opens up the seven vials. Nonetheless, we find ourselves tonight in the sixth trumpet so either A, this is a retelling of the six seal, or B, this is actually what we might discover the 13th of the judgments of God. Why is that important? Because the river Euphrates is about to be opened up. The four angels that have been set for a day and a time and a place are there to enact that which has been unfathomable for two millennia.

Notice what it says in verse 16, it says,

16 And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.

Two hundred thousand thousand. What we have here and, by the way, if you read on it in chapter 9, it says that one third of the earth's population will be destroyed by this army, an army of 200 million. As I mentioned, for hundreds and thousands of years Christian communities read this passage and either said one of two things, either A, it's figurative

meaning the Lord is just saying an army that's really really big, or B, supernatural, it's not really a human army.

Now I do think there is evidence that this could be a supernatural army but let's just go with the idea that this is actually an entity of humanity, that this is actually an army of humanity that marches across the land with a purpose of destroying humanity. I want you to think about 200 million. That's a significant number of people. Let me put it in perspective. In the year 1800, there was only one billion people on planet earth. One billion. Now why is that significant? Because generally speaking half the population is male and half the population is female, and we would all agree that throughout time the overwhelming majority of those who have fought in the army have been male so that would leave us with a potential 500 million people. But then you have to consider those that are too well mature to fight, and those that are too young to fight. In fact, the book of Numbers 14 says that a man's fighting range was between age 20 and 50, all right? Now some of you are going, "Man, I'm out of the draft there." But can we all agree that out of 500 million potential male candidates, only roughly half of those could be qualified to even serve in the army. Why is that significant? Because if the world wanted to create its own army of 200 million people, it couldn't even do it until the year 1800, the problem with it is this army actually kills a third of the people on planet earth. So it couldn't just be an army of the totality of humanity.

So when is it that we find ourselves in a position where a group of people could actually fulfill this? The year was about 1900. The year 1900, the world population was about 1.6 billion and it is actually feasible to do the math here with 200 million destroying one third of humanity. Here's the interesting thing, that what we know as this passage parallels chapter 16 which talks about the armies of the East that come westward into what we know as Jerusalem. Why is that important? Because if you begin to look at the armies of the East, the population of what we know as Asia, they could not have fulfilled this prophecy until the early 1900s, roughly about 100 years ago. Why do I bring this up? Because right now if you went home and you saw the ticker on the news or a news headline update that said Asia had joined their forces and created a super army of 200 million people, would you be shocked? I wouldn't be. Billions of people are residents of Asia, in fact, almost half the world's population, and so an army of 200 million people just from the continent of Asia is not just fathomable, I don't think we'd even panic. We would look at that little ticker and say, well, there's so many of them and it makes perfect sense. For over 1,900 years the Christian community said there's no way this could be real, there's no way it's really going to happen the way the Bible says, and yet today we live in a world where it wouldn't shock us.

The next issue is found actually in chapter 12. We're going to deal with the issue of globalization and power and this one is going to be a little more specific to you and I in our culture because all throughout time there have been world powers, in fact, the book of Daniel prophesied this not only in chapter 2 but in chapter 7, and in his prophetic statements, kind of the last great power that's mentioned there in chapter 2 is what we know as the Roman Empire, but yet you and I today, we live in a society, in a globalized world and this isn't ethnocentric, it's not narcissistic to say this, what we know as the

United States and its culture is the dominating force of the world. If you don't believe me, just go overseas, try to rent a taxi and try to offer something and they'll say, "No English," whatever it is. You pull out a \$20 bill and it's like, "Yes, sir, where would you like to go?" I mean, it's perfect English everywhere you go. In fact, the world uses the currency, uses the language and tries to utilize the dress code. In fact, the culture of the United States has actually become the culture of the world. When you look at the economic position, when you look at the military position, there's honestly not been a "world power" that has been what we are today in the history of the world.

So in chapter 12, beginning in verse 13, this is the passage of chapter 12 we did not read this morning. It says,

13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman [remember that's Israel] which brought forth the man child. 14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. 15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

Now why would I read that passage when it comes to globalization and world powers? Because there are many people who read this passage of Scripture and say, "Aha, that's the United States. That's us. We are that power. We are that entity that in those very last days takes care of the people of God. We are that great eagle." The reason we say that is because that is the symbol of our country, lest I remind you originally it was the turkey, but that's a whole other issue. You know, I mentioned this morning, I think one of the biggest problems that we have when it comes to interpreting the book of Revelation is our lack of knowledge of the Old Testament. Oftentimes we go into the book of Revelation and we read something and we go, of course, it's got to mean this when over 250 times it's actually an allusion to or a quotation from the Old Testament.

What do we see happening here in Revelation 12? We see the people of God being rescued on the wings of an eagle. Do you know that there are actually two other places in your Old Testament where it talks about the people of God being rescued on the wings of an eagle? Exodus 19, the Israelites are being taken out of what we know as Egypt after 400 years. They cross the Red Sea and what does the Lord say? "I delivered you on eagle's wings." Now I've read the story in Exodus a whole bunch and I don't remember any eagles. I remember dry land. I remember the staff of Moses, but the Lord described it as eagle's wings. Why is this important? Remember what happened to the Israelites when they get to the other side? He supernaturally feeds them. He brings manna from heaven when there was no access to food. Then there's this passage in Isaiah 40:31. We love that passage, "For he shall deliver us up on," you guessed it, "eagle's wings." That passage in Isaiah 40 is actually a prophetic passage about the Lord doing again with his people what he's done in the past. Why is that important? Because what you just read in Revelation 12

is the fulfillment of that passage. Just like he did coming out of Egypt, God is going to deliver his people from whom we know as the beast, the Antichrist, the dragon that's mentioned in this passage.

The deliverance from God in Revelation 12:13 through 16, I hate to tell you, has nothing to do with the United States of America, and if the US is not in these verses, then I hate to tell you you're going to be hard-pressed to find us in any of them. Do you know what's intriguing about the places you find in the book of Revelation as far as geopolitical entities? The overwhelming majority of the places listed in the book of Revelation were basically inconsequential for 1,900+ years, places such as Gog and Magog, Turkey and Russia, for hundreds of years were just on the outskirts of human thought and now all of a sudden they're in our headlines every single day.

Now why does this cause us issue? Because you and I today right now, at least those of us physically here in Opelika, Alabama, and the majority of people who are watching online, we are residents of, we are citizens, we live and breathe in that powerful entity and we think how, how is it that the most powerful entity in the world could no longer be in an instant? Lest you have not read your history, it's happened before. In fact, there's really two ways that an entity such as the United States could "cease to be the power that we think it is as mentioned in the book of Revelation." 1. We could go by the way of all the other great powers, either A, lose our influence, B, be absorbed, C, just somewhat become a second tier, third tier, whatever it may be. Can we all just be transparent tonight? Would that shock you if that occurred at any moment, at any time? It wouldn't shock me. When you see what's happening in our country, when you see what we're allowing, what we're endorsing, what we're celebrating, it is by the mercy of God we still exist, people, all right? So the idea that God would allow us to be thumped in a 24 hour period, if you haven't read Daniel 5, it can happen. You remember Belshazzar? Babylon. The power of the world, the writing on the wall that Daniel interpreted, within 24 hours without a shot being fired, all of a sudden the Medes and the Persians were in control.

So the idea of the world's greatest "superpower," for lack of better terms, just going off the scene in that position, I didn't say cease to exist, just not the power, the influence, the mover, the shaker, whatever it may be that it once was, I don't think any of us would be shocked at the expedited manner in which that could potentially happen. So you look at the book of Revelation and our world today, and we now see that even an entity such as our own could easily become inconsequential to the world's events just like Daniel 5 in an instant, in a night.

On to chapter 13, the last what I call leading indicator, the idea of scientific progress. I know we live in a world where every day we're hearing about new discoveries, new opportunities, new beings and new ways, and I'm very grateful for those of you who have a scientific background and you make the world for the rest of us a whole lot more conditioned, so to speak, but in Revelation 13:16 through 18, we have that famous passage about the mark of the beast. Oh, that famous 666 and, man, we could talk for hours on this, I promise I'm just going to keep you for 90 more minutes, it's no big deal. Hopefully you all got my humor.

Verse 16 says,

16 And he [that's the Antichrist] causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

Now tonight we're not going to debate what this famous 666 is, what it may be, what it may not be, but here's what I want to address. When we talk about scientific progress, I find it fascinating, verse 16, of how what we know as the mark of the beast is implemented. Now this is one of those times where I'm going to ask you to pay close attention to the Bible that you have in your hands. Some of you are old school like myself, it's a paper copy, some of you have it on your phones, your tablets, irregardless I want you to look down at the location: right hand, forehead, correct? But it's the word before that that is important. Some of your Bibles will say "in the right hand," some of yours will say "on the right-hand." Now just for entertainment purposes, if your Bible that you have right now says "in," i-n, raise your hand. Who's got "in" in the house? Okay, put your hands down. Whose says "on"? All right, there we go.

Now I'm going to explain that in just a moment but allow me to share with you what that word is. The word that is translated either "in" or "on" is the word "epi." Anybody got an EpiPen in their purse? We know what epi means. "Epi" is a word that we have no idea what it means. You say, "Well, of course we do." No, we don't. What we know as the word "epi" is a word in Greek that can only be translated by context. That's it. In other words, it means "in, on, through, under, above, around." It's simply a descriptive word. For example, in the book of what we know as Philemon, the Apostle Paul says, "I remember you," epi. "in my prayers." Well, you would never say I remember you over my prayers. You would never say I remember you under my prayers. You would always say I remember you in my prayers, correct? All right, in other words, the word cannot be translated with a specific word, it has to be translated in context.

Now for those of you who have children, allow me to utilize this illustration. If you got a call from Paul Dunbar, our kids' pastor, he called you up on Sunday morning, "Hey, Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so, I want you to know everything's going good in the kid's building. Your child is in the warehouse," the warehouse is the upstairs large group gathering area. What would you say? "Well, of course, they're perfectly behaved children, that's exactly what they're supposed to do." But what if Paul called you up, "Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so I want you to know that your child is on the warehouse." How would you respond? A little differently, would you not? But the word is the same. You can only translate it by context.

Here's what I find fascinating. Those of you who raised your hand and said that the word is "in," i-n, are actually utilizing a translation of the Bible that dates all the way back to the 17th century, okay? Those of you who have a Bible that says "on" are actually utilizing English translations that are dated the late 19th and 20th centuries. Now here's what's fascinating: what we know as the hypodermic needle was not even invented until the late 17th century and wasn't implemented on a regular basis until what we know as the Civil War time period. Now I want you to think about that for just a moment. Those of you who raised your hand the first time, the Bible that you have in your hands was translated almost 450 years ago, 250 years before the hypodermic needle and look how it's translated, "in." You couldn't even do it back then so why would they translate it "in"? Because whom we know as the Antichrist is going to be the most stealth, the most delusional, the most deceptive entity the world has ever known and the greatest deception is not what you can see on the outside but that which is hidden on the inside, and when you get to chapter 16, guess what the Lord does? He exposes that famous mark of the beast and it says there is a boil that comes up wherever it was inserted, in other words, it's on the inside and it makes itself manifest. For those of you whose Bible say "on," it's pretty intriguing. You find your way to the middle 18 to early 1900s, you can go and do all the research yourself, start looking up the commentaries on the book of Revelation and this is a little idea of what they'll say. There is no way you can put something in the body, it has to be translated "on the body." Fast forward to the 21st century, guess what the commentaries are saying now? It's better to translate it "in the body" because now we know that's easily readily done.

Do you know what that proves to me? For years and years and years we've thought that somehow the Bible was trying to catch up with science, science is just trying to catch up with the Bible. The Bible told us hundreds of years ago that the Antichrist is going to come and he's going to mark his followers by somehow placing it in the body. Now I didn't tell you what I think that might be and I'm not here to speculate on it but can we all just agree that scientific progress has now gotten to the point would this shock you at all? In fact, one of the largest retailers in the world came out with an article this week that at one of their specific stores, you're going to be able to check out using the scanning of your palm and nobody gets upset about it. It's just become a part of our world.

An army of 200 million people? The greatest superpower in the history of the world falling off the scene? Or something inserted in our bodies that allows the buying and purchasing and selling of items a little bit easier? You do realize that 100 years ago that seemed unfathomable but today you're not even shocked, you're not even panicked because we know that all of these items, even taken in the most literal fashion, could happen just as they're written. Ladies and gentlemen, this isn't even one of the 300+ prophecies. This is just the fact that the Lord gave us a message through the Apostle John 2,000 years ago that for hundreds and hundreds of years believers who love Jesus said there is no way it could happen that way, and right now, I don't know about you but I'm saying I can see it happening that way which means that everything that the Lord has given us in the book of Revelation is going to happen exactly as God told us. Every verse. Every word. Every aspect. Every item.

You know, there's an old adage here in our culture that says there's only two things that are sure, death and taxes, right? Actually there's only one thing that's really sure and that's Jesus is coming back and there is nothing that has to happen before he comes back for us, there's a whole lot that has to happen before he comes back with us. Some of the things that have to happen before he comes back with us may, in fact, happen before he comes back for us, and at least tonight three of those things don't even seem like a stretch of the imagination.