

Summer 2018 Newsletter
Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia
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THE TIME OF THE END

“Be certain of this, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” 2 Timothy 3:1

The Scriptures are full of references to “the last days.” “the time of the end,” and, more indirectly, phrases such as “in those days.” That there is to be a limit to this world’s affairs seems to be the clear Bible position, but what then? Will it mean the annihilation of mankind? How will it come, and can we know if we are close to the end? Are there signs to show us?

The continued existence of the human race on this planet is threatened on every side. Recently the fear of thermo-nuclear war once again reared its ugly head as North Korea took to flexing its nuclear muscles. Not since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 has the world been so near the brink.

The Middle East is in continuous turmoil—the Arabs fighting Israel and the Arabs fighting terrorism among themselves. In Europe, the noble experiment of a united Europe is beginning to shatter as the countries struggle with internal problems, not the least of which is Middle Eastern immigration and consequent Islamic inspired murders and riots. In the U.S. mass murder of school children is the new trend.

Scientists warn that the use of fossil fuels is causing global warming. They warn that unless checked the end results will be the melting of the ice caps and the consequent rise of ocean levels, flooding shorelines around the world. For many island nations, rising sea levels will mean the displacement

of whole societies as their islands disappear beneath the water. People living in places such as Greenland are already experiencing the sinking and cracking of the foundations of their homes as the perma-frost softens.

Global warming is also causing hurricanes to intensify. Three devastating hurricanes hit Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico this past season. People in these places are still trying to recover as the new hurricane season is upon us. Add to this that each year somewhere in the world there are tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, floods, wild fires, as well as diseases and pestilences visiting misery upon mankind.

In Hawaii, Mt. Kilauea, once considered a novel tourist attraction, bared its teeth by erupting in earnest, oozing lava from a score of new vents and overrunning neighborhoods and farmlands destroying more than 700 homes, but, thankfully, without the loss of life. However, in Central America the eruption of Guatemala’s Volcan de Fuego killed more than 100 people as clouds of burning ash rolled over entire villages within minutes, killing whole families still inside their homes. All over the world there are other cities and villages at the base of volcanoes they hope will not erupt.

And, scientists predict that the sun will one day follow the pattern of other stars and explode in a super nova that will engulf the earth and the entire solar system.

All these things raise the inevitable question, is man's tenure on this earth limited? Ecclesiastes 1:4 says "the earth remains forever." In confirming his promise to bless Israel, God used the permanence of the cycles of day and night to verify the surety of his word. (Jeremiah 33:14-22) If these are to remain and the human race is meant to live here, why is there such disaster facing man on every side?

Genesis 2:8 tells us that God specially prepared the garden in Eden into which he placed the man he had formed. Outside of the garden the earth had been left in its primitive unrefined condition for man's education in unrighteousness. Having created man to be a thinking reasoning creature, God knew that he would wonder about evil and wish to know more. So, when the serpent approached Eve, telling her that she would know both good and evil if she ate the fruit, she was enticed and took the bait, and Adam joined in her sin. In Genesis 3:17 God told Adam that the ground also was cursed because of him. So, into the hostile earth they were driven to eke out the best living they could.

The question is, will mankind always have to struggle to survive? Will tragedy and death always be our lot? When the scriptures speak of the "Time of the End," does it offer us hope that relief is coming? If so, when?

Our Lord's Great Prophecy

Our Lord uttered one of the most remarkable prophecies of Holy Writ respecting the "Time of the end"—the closing epoch of this Christian era. It was uttered near the close of his earthly ministry, when he was endeavoring to prepare his disciples for the new dispensation—the age when the Gospel message would go out into the world—which would be fully introduced after the tragedy of Calvary. Jesus' prophecy is recorded with much similarity by the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke.



Jesus had told the disciples many things that they did not understand. He told them that they would be hated for their faithfulness to him and his teachings; that he would be put to death by the chief priests and elders but would rise on the third day. (Matthew 16:21) He told them that the Scribes and Pharisees spoke the words of Moses and the Law, but they themselves were hypocrites. (Matthew 23:1-35) They heard him lament over Jerusalem because of the trouble that would soon come upon her for her unfaithfulness. (verses 37-39) Then Jesus astonished them by telling them that their great temple, the focal point of their worship of God, would be destroyed completely. (Matthew 24:1,2)

With Jesus' reference to the temple still ringing in their ears, the disciples sought more definite information from the Master on these points which were not clear to them. They asked Jesus, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what is the sign of thy presence (*parousia*), and of the full end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3, *Youngs Literal Translation*)

In Matthew 24:4-14 Jesus gave an outline of events which would fill the interim between his first and second advents that included wars, famines and persecutions that would be a test of endurance for his faithful followers. He wanted them to know that they must not expect the promised honors and glories of the Kingdom to come to them immediately. Before they, and those who would believe on Jesus through their word (John 17:20), would reign with him (Matthew 19:28; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 10:6), there would come trials and sufferings for his name sake. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matthew 24:13)

Jesus warned that false Christs would arise and deceive many (verse 3). Gamaliel mentions two of these in his speech recorded in Acts 5:35-37. In 1648, Sabbathai Levi from Smyrna, announced himself "the first-born Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of Israel." These, however, and the many others who claimed to be the Messiah deceived relatively few. A far greater peril for the true followers of Christ would be the rise of what Jesus called, "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet." (verse 15; Daniel 11:31)

Although most Bible commentators interpret the "abomination that maketh desolate" of Daniel 11:13 as an altar to Jupiter in the temple of Jerusalem placed there by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 BC, Jesus' reference to it as a future event obliges us to look for its fulfillment during the Christian era. Antiochus' attempt was to replace the Jewish worship of Jehovah with the worship of Jupiter. A parallel to this would be the rise of an apostate system that would substitute something to replace the reliance on Jesus alone for salvation.



The Apostle Paul, further described this system saying, "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin in revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God....For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way." (2 Thessalonians 2:1-7, *New King James Version*)

Looking at the history of the Christian era, we see the rise of such an institution. It declared itself to be the only true church and the only channel of salvation. It replaced reliance on the blood of Christ with the performance of rites and penances, with holy waters and relics, and prayers to saints in place of God. On its hand is also the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

The fig tree is a symbol of Israel. In Jeremiah 24, Israel is represented by two baskets of figs, one good and one bad, inedible. God used the figs to represent the nation of Israel, both evil and good and their coming captivity in Babylon.

That Israel is once again a nation in its own land is the fulfillment of prophecy and a clear marker of our position on the stream of time. "Now



learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things

know that it is near, even at the doors." (Matthew 24:32-33) Luke adds dimension to this sign: "And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and **all the trees**; When they now shoot forth, ... know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." (Luke 21:29-31) Since 1914, there have been more than 100 new sovereign nations established across the globe, most of them since the end of the Second World War. Truly, "all the trees" have been putting forth their leaves.

God has been preparing his Church for the last two thousand years. Now He has once again rebuilt the "Tabernacle of David" [Israel] in its land. "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old... And I will bring again the captivity [exiles] of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." (Amos 9:11,14,15; Acts 15:14-17) Soon God will turn his attention to the "residue of men," the whole world of mankind including those who have gone down into death—"who sleep in the dust of the earth."

A Great Time of Trouble

Jesus said, "Then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will

be shortened." (Matthew 24:21,22) The prophet Daniel also prophesied of this trouble: "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time....And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:1,2; John 5:28,29)

This time of trouble will be unlike the "wars and rumors of wars" that filled the interim between Jesus' first and second advents in that it would be within man's power to destroy all life on the earth. After the first use of atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, the world powers went into an atomic arms frenzy. It wasn't long before the atomic arsenals of the nations could destroy all life, not just once, but many times over. Since then, the nations have lived in an uneasy peace.

The world is now a global community. Ideas circulate freely via the internet. Earth's political, financial, societal and religious elements are roiling and heaving. Nationalism and governmental instability is pulling nations apart. Trade wars threaten the global economy and the trust between nations. Crumbling moral standards are causing family breakdown and thereby weakening the fabric of society. Agnosticism and extremism mark the gamut of religious thought in the world today. However, whether it is accepted or not, "this gospel of the kingdom [has been] preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations." (Matthew 24:14)

The clouds are gathering, and the storm must break, but upon the wrecks of these nations the God of Heaven will set up his kingdom of blessing for all. "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads; because your redemption (deliverance) draws near." (Luke 21:28, NKJV)

"When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."
Isaiah 26:9

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