



Are We Living in the
**Time of
the End?**

WAR
MURDER
DEATH
DESTRUCTION
CRIME
HUMANITY
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Contents

3 Are We Living in the Time of the End?

Religious people aren't the only ones asking this crucial question. Many recognize that we live in an increasingly dangerous world.

5 What Is the Time of the End?

How does the Bible use the term *time of the end*? What exactly is it? Are we in that time yet? Is there a way to know?

11 The End of the Age

Jesus Christ spoke of a coming "end of the age." What did He mean? What age did He say would come to an end?

23 Jesus Christ's Olivet Prophecy: Where Are We Now?

In a remarkable prophecy shortly before His death, Jesus described the signs that would precede His return. What do those signs reveal?

31 The End Time in the Book of Revelation

In the biblical book of Revelation, Jesus Christ foretold many more signs of the time of the end. What do these mysterious signs mean?

38 God's Framework for End-Time Prophecy

Bible prophecy reveals several specific conditions that must be met before Christ returns to earth. Where are we on this prophetic time scale?

44 Preparing for the End Time

Why does God reveal what the future holds? So we will be spurred to change. What do you need to do to be prepared?

Are We Living in the Time of the End?

For thousands of years people have been fascinated with predictions of the end of the world.

People who read and study the Bible are not the only ones concerned about where our world is headed. The late author Isaac Asimov, in his book *The Choice of Catastrophes: The Disasters That Threaten Our World*, listed and explained at least 15 dangers that could jeopardize human survival. Many of these potential global disasters, including nuclear war, have arrived at our door only in the last few decades.

At times people thought they understood when and how our age would end. But failed expectations about the end of the age have brought profound disappointment to scores of sincere religious individuals and groups. They thought they were correctly discerning the time and manner of the fulfillment of prophecy. But all have been wrong, or at least premature.

In spite of centuries of such



Many biblical prophecies leave us in no doubt that increasingly cataclysmic events will occur before God's direct intervention in human affairs.

disappointments, they haven't put an end to attempts to associate world events and conditions with biblical prophecies concerning the end time. This is especially true in America, where books, television and radio programs focusing on biblical prophecy abound.

If we look into the inspired writings of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus Christ's apostles, we find many prophecies that refer to the time of the end. Should we take them seriously? Should they mean

anything to us? Are world conditions such that the predictions could be fulfilled in our day? Are we near the climax of the prophesied period in which the world is faced with insurmountable problems and global distress of holocaust proportions? Are we approaching Armageddon?

Jesus Christ Himself talked of a future time so horrendous that “if that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive*”—everyone alive would die if that time was not cut short (Matthew 24:22,

Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout). Was He speaking of our time?

Many Bible prophecies leave us in no doubt that increasingly cataclysmic events will occur before God’s direct intervention in human affairs. These terrifying prophetic occurrences *will* see their



If we look into the inspired writings of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus Christ’s apostles, we find many prophecies that refer to the time of the end. Should we take them seriously?

fulfillment at some future time. The crucial question is *when*.

Much confusion surrounds the timing of these prophecies. But this need not be so. The Bible itself reveals certain vital keys that will help us place these forewarnings in an understandable prophetic framework. We must let the Bible itself interpret its prophecies.

In this booklet we examine exactly what Jesus Christ, His apostles and the prophets of old really said about the perilous days they referred to as the time of the end.

Photos, from left: Shaun Venish, Scott Ashley

What Is the Time of the End?

Jesus Christ’s disciples admired the enormous and intricate design of the temple buildings in Jerusalem. Some of the foundation stones of the temple complex were massive, weighing many tons. Others were ornately carved in beautiful patterns. The sunlight sparkled on the polished stones and intricate gold ornamentation of the temple.

The disciples wanted to know if their teacher was as impressed as they were. Matthew 24:1-2 describes the setting: “Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’”

Jesus’ statement (referring prophetically to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70) must have astonished His disciples. They were greatly troubled by His statement that the



“And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.’”

beautiful temple buildings would be destroyed. Later Christ’s disciples came to Him privately, their minds still fixed on His shocking comments. “Tell us,” they asked, “when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?” (verse 3).

Searching for understanding

Some 2,000 years later, Christians are still asking what events will signal the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ. He answered this

important question. The problem most people face with His answer has to do with interpretation. We want our answers clean and neat, like a precise solution to a math problem.

Instead, the meaning of Christ's answer involves an understanding of the periodic repetition of trends and devastating events that have transpired over the last 2,000 years, as well as a perception of the increased intensity and magnitude of similar occurrences as we near the end.

But we should remember that Jesus made it clear that no one could know the exact time of His return: "... Of that day and hour *no one knows*, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (verse 36). Only the Father knows the precise time of His Son's return. Yet we *can* understand important prophecies and prophetic principles that give clear indication His return is imminent.

Jesus gave His disciples signs that require a broad perspective of understanding. Some prophetic trends would recur over time but intensify before Christ's second coming. Other conditions will be unique to that one point in history. Some of the crucial prophecies that will usher in Christ's return are not fully apparent; many of the correlating signs we find in the lengthy end-time prophecy He gave and the writings of other biblical prophets are still unfolding.

We will discuss these biblical signs, the keys that unlock future events in the light of Bible prophecy. But first let's examine how the Bible uses the term *time of the end*.

What exactly is the time of the end? When will it come? Are we living in the end time? Is there a way to know?

The subject of the time of the end spans the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It is one of the major themes of Scripture. It is important to understand *what the end time is*. Misunderstanding it can cause great confusion, uncertainty and mental turmoil. But a good biblical grasp of the subject can bring comfort and confidence. So let's go to the Bible to see what it reveals about the end time.

The meaning of "the time of the end"

One brief overview of the time of the end is found in the book of Daniel. Starting in Daniel 11:40, God reveals to Daniel several major events to take place "at the time of the end."

In chapter 12 God tells Daniel: "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 at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.

"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,

A World in Perpetual Crisis

The remarkable characteristic of the crises of today is their continuity—David Burnett King.

British author Anthony Sampson has written three "anatomies of Britain" in recent decades. His latest conveys a sense of urgency. Even the title tells us his focus has shifted into a higher gear: a crisis mode.

The Essential Anatomy of Britain: Democracy in Crisis includes a chapter with an obvious warning to the British government to get its house in order. No such chapter appeared in the first two editions.

Britain's chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, wrote: "Today's prophets, I realized with some sadness, are often not religious leaders but a small group of academics who, breaking free of disciplinary specialisation, have surveyed our age from the broadest of perspectives

and brought back a report of imminent danger" (*Faith in the Future*, 1995, p. 65).

Prophetic voices have sounded warnings for some time, pointing to the ominous signs on the world scene. Some foretell a crisis that will signal a massive change in our world.

This is clearly reflected in the titles of several other recent books. American author James Dale Davidson and his British counterpart, William Rees-Mogg, titled their book *The Great Reckoning*. Historian Eric Hobsbawm used the title *The Age of Extremes*.

American author and educator David

Burnett King notes in *The Crisis of Our Time* that "there exists a profound feeling of unease... We are passing through some sort of crisis, riding out a sea change that will somehow make the future very different from our past" (1988, p. 17).

The plain truth is that we may be fast approaching a transition between two distinct ages, the age of man and the age to come of which Jesus Christ spoke (Matthew 12:32).

Historian Eric Hobsbawm shows in another book, *The Age of Revolution*, that the earth cannot continue indefinitely to bear the unwanted fruits of the darker aspects of modern technology. He wrote:



"We have reached a point of historic crisis. The forces generated by the technological economy are now great enough to destroy the environment, that is to say the material foundations of human life."

As David King reminds us: "The nature of crisis has changed. The remarkable characteristic of the crises of today is their continuity—they have moved in, it seems, to stay" (*The Crisis of Our Time*).

We could be headed for the biblical "crisis at the close" (Daniel 12:9, Moffatt Translation)—the greatest crisis in all of human history culminating in the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Noah and Our Time: A Sobering Parallel

Jesus Christ used the example of Noah's day to reveal the attitudes that would predominate near the end: "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:37-39).

Here we see history and prophecy working together. The meaning is clear: The attitude of people in Noah's day would prevail again just before Christ's second coming. As in the former case, God would be deemed as far away, unconcerned about human activities on earth, with life appearing to go on as always (2 Peter 3:3-6). Like before, people would be unconcerned as

days: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having



Jesus Christ warns us not to fall into the trap of the thinking of the people of Noah's day, who put God out of their minds until it was too late. At the time of the end God will be far from most people's thinking.

to their true spiritual condition and blind to God's impending judgment.

The key to the example Christ gave is to understand that people can be so concerned about the cares of this life that they ignore their Creator (Matthew 6:33; Luke 21:34-35). It happened before, and it is happening again.

The apostle Paul similarly foretold the overall self-seeking mind-set that would dominate people's thinking in the last

a form of godliness, but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

This perfectly describes the overall attitude and outlook of our age. Such thinking will prevent the vast majority of humanity from believing God and the biblical warning signs indicating Christ's imminent return. Like the people in Noah's time who laughed and mocked as he built the ark, the end of this age will come when the overwhelming majority are unprepared.

some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt... But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until *the time of the end*; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (verses 1-4).

Here the end time is described as culminating in "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." It is also a time of increased travel and communication and an explosion of knowledge, as seen from the description that "many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase."

Several centuries after Daniel's time, Jesus' disciples asked Him about the end time. His response echoed Daniel's words: "For 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*" (Matthew 24:21).

Later God revealed to Daniel more information about the end. "And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, 'How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?' Then I heard the man clothed in linen [say] ... that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.

"Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, 'My lord, what shall be the end of these things?' And he said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end'" (Daniel 12:6-9).

This scripture indicates that the time of the end *will be discernible* to God's people. This time is the period leading up to and including unparalleled world trouble lasting 3½ years (in biblical language, "a time [a year], times [two years] and half a time [half a year]"), which will conclude with the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

A word of caution

Although Scripture reveals certain conditions will deteriorate as the end of the age draws near, we should not confuse the conditions we see around us with the *specific* final period prophesied in the Bible. Global conditions could degenerate over a considerable amount of time before they lead to the concluding events of the last days. The final days of this era will be marked by specific prophetic events.

Jesus Christ cautioned His disciples to be careful if they thought they were witnessing the signs of the end of the age. "And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them" (Luke 21:8, King James Version).

Consequently, He warned, many would come in His name, claiming to represent Him. Some would interpret such developments and

conditions as certain signs of the end time. But they would be wrong and lead many people astray. Thus the mere presence of charismatic religious leaders, wars or global disasters is not enough to confirm the arrival of the end time.

Specific events to unfold

To avoid confusing general world troubles with actual end-time events, the Bible describes specific events and conditions that will occur in the final days.

One unmistakable end-time event will be the coming domination of Jerusalem by gentiles (non-Israelites). Jesus Christ prophesied that “Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

In Revelation 11:1-2 an angel reveals to the apostle John how long gentiles will control the city: “And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months”—the equivalent of 3½ years.

It will also be a time of intense persecution of God’s people. Jesus warned of troubling trends that He called “the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8). Then, He said, “they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (verses 9-13).

In the book of Revelation, John sees a vision in which some of God’s people, depicted as a woman, are sheltered from Satan’s persecution and “nourished for a time and times and half a time”—for 3½ years (Revelation 12:14). Furious at being unable to attack these people, Satan will “make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (verse 17).

Thus we see in three prophecies of the end time that the focus is on a culminating 3½-year period of worldwide distress so terrifying and threatening to human survival that God will never allow such to occur again. Such prophecies help us understand the conditions and events that will mark the beginning of this crucial period.

The End of the Age

Some think the subject of the end time in the Bible is mainly confined to the New Testament. But beginning in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the Scriptures look beyond our present evil age to the time of the establishing of God’s Kingdom. Old Testament scriptures have much to say about events that take place during the end of this age and the following “world to come.”

In the Garden of Eden, God revealed that a time would come when Satan’s earthly reign and influence would end. To Satan, God said: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed [Jesus Christ]; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Although Satan was destined to harm the Savior (by instigating His crucifixion), the devil could not prevent Jesus from coming back to life and cannot prevent Jesus from ultimately defeating him.

Paul referred to this prophecy when he wrote to Church members in Rome, “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20). It is comforting to know that at Christ’s second coming Satan will at last be vanquished and imprisoned (Revelation 20:1-3).

So, from the earliest beginnings of humanity, God revealed there would be an end to this Satan-led world, a definite time for the devil and his forces to be defeated.

Righteous men mentioned in the Old Testament, such as Enoch, knew that God ultimately would intervene to carry out His judgment on earth. “Now Enoch, the seventh [generation] from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him’” (Jude 14-15).

After the Flood other faithful men such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob looked beyond the present age to the time when God’s Kingdom would be established. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:8-10).

The patriarchs knew that God would one day establish His Kingdom.

They lived and died confident that He would fulfill His promises and include them in His Kingdom.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but *having seen them afar off* were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that

is, *a heavenly country* [God’s Kingdom]. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (verses 13-16).

These men were not imagining or guessing about the future. They were directly inspired by God. As Peter explained, “prophecy never came by



The end of this age will see unparalleled human suffering in the prophet Daniel’s words, “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”

the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

We find many prophecies about end-time events in the book of Psalms. Psalm 2 reveals that some nations will oppose the rule of Christ: “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? ... I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel’” (Psalm 2:1, 7-9).

(Some other passages in Psalms mentioning end-time events are: 9:5-15; 10:3-18; 11:1-7; 12:3-5; 21:8-12; 46:8-10; 47:1-4; 75:7-8; 76:7-9; 96:10-13; 97:1-6; 98:1-3; 99:1-5; and 110:1-6).

The end time: a theme of the prophets

Although prophecies relating to the end time are only occasionally

found in the early books of the Old Testament, they are a major theme of the prophets who wrote several centuries later. Peter explains that these prophets were “searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ [the time of His first coming], and the glory that should follow [His second coming]” (1 Peter 1:11, King James Version).

Isaiah is a prime example of how often God spoke about end-time conditions and the coming Kingdom Jesus Christ would establish at His return. This period is also frequently referred to as “the day of the LORD,” “the latter days,” “the last days” or simply “that day.” Here are a few examples that show this recurring theme in Isaiah:

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’

“For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people. They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:2-4).

“Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up—and it shall be brought low ... They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily” (Isaiah 2:10-12, 19).

“In that day the Branch of the LORD [Jesus Christ] shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—every one who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem” (Isaiah 4:2-3).

“There shall come forth a Rod [Jesus Christ] from the stem of Jesse [father of King David], and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him ... He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked ... And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious” (Isaiah 11:1-4, 10).

“Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate, and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. ‘I will punish the world for its evil ... Therefore I will shake the heavens and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts’” (Isaiah 13:9-13).

Literally dozens more such prophecies appear in the book of Isaiah and almost as many in the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. These men prophesied of the terrible days that would precede the coming of the Messiah as King of Kings.

Other prophets speak explicitly of the end times

Virtually all 12 of the books known as the Minor Prophets have something to say about the end time. Joel and Zechariah are examples.

God inspired Joel to describe the great destruction that would take place during the Day of the Lord: “Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand. A day of darkness and gloominess ... The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?” (Joel 2:1-2, 11).

Zechariah adds: “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem ... Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east ... And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—‘The LORD is one,’ and His name one” (Zechariah 14:1-3, 9).

The theme of the end time and the Kingdom of God figures so prominently in the books of the prophets that Peter told the Jews they should believe in Christ because of this testimony. Peter admonished them: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21).

The end time in the New Testament

Jesus’ longest prophecy about the end time is found in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 in what is commonly called the Olivet Prophecy.

On this occasion, during the week leading up to His crucifixion, Jesus and His disciples left the temple grounds and climbed the Mount of Olives (or Mount Olivet) to enjoy a spectacular view of the city and the temple gleaming with its white stones and sparkling gold ornamentation. “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?’” (Mark 13:3-4).



Christ then revealed to them the conditions on earth leading up to His return. He said it would be a time of increasing troubles and turmoil. He warned that during this time mankind would have the capacity to annihilate human life from the face of the earth. “It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and

The temple in Jerusalem was the center of Israel’s worship of God. God’s presence was manifested there.

will never be again. *If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive; but for the sake of God’s chosen it will be cut short*” (Matthew 24:21-22, REB).

Mighty as the Roman Empire was in those days, its legions didn’t come close to having the armaments to wipe mankind from the face of the earth. This condition would only become a real possibility in the 20th century with the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction—nuclear, chemical and biological—in a worldwide arsenal with the capacity to kill every man, woman and child many times over.

Signs of an approaching end

Jesus described in a brief outline form the conditions that would indicate the end time was nearing. He warned His disciples: “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5, KJV).

Jesus first prophesied it would be common to use His name to win

over followers. This suggests that many outwardly Christian churches, denominations and organizations would exist at the time of the end, and many would be deceived into believing their leaders represented Christ. Yet the Church that *truly* follows Christ would be faithfully obeying God's Word and His commandments. Jesus warned, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Next He described political, military and environmental trends before His second coming. "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See



that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:6-8).

The prophet Zechariah describes how Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives (background, above), which overlooks Jerusalem (foreground) on the city's east side.

An analogy of labor pains

Many assume the constant reports of wars, violence, uprisings, famine, epidemics, earthquakes and natural disasters in our headlines are sure signs we are in the end time. Certainly Jesus Christ and other biblical prophets made it clear such tragedies will shake the earth as the time of the end approaches.

But Jesus Christ Himself explained that these factors, by themselves, do not reveal we are in the end time, because there would be *many* such catastrophes before He returns. These tragedies, Jesus said, set the stage for the *greater* turmoil and sorrow of the end time. Horrifying and deadly as they are, these disasters are only "the *beginning* of sorrows." The worst is yet to come.

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible translates Christ's words in Matthew 24:8 as "all this is but the beginning of the *birth*

pangs." Jesus was using an analogy of a woman in labor. As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains: "These things, Jesus said, will be the beginning of birth pains. As a pregnant woman's birth pains indicate that her child will soon be born, so these universal conflicts and catastrophes will mean the end of this interadvent Age is near" (1997, comment on Matthew 24:8).

So Christ was not referring to the periodic catastrophes such as wars, famines, disease epidemics and earthquakes that occasionally strike, but to a *unique* time when such events *would steadily worsen*. Just as labor contractions get stronger and closer together before birth, so would these events markedly increase in frequency and intensity before Christ's return.

We should consider three important questions when analyzing whether events are the signs of the end time Jesus Christ described. First, could they simply be part of the normal ebb and flow of disasters people have experienced throughout history? Second, are *all* the signs Jesus mentioned in place? Third, is there solid evidence the prophesied trends and conditions are inexorably increasing and intensifying?

Many well-meaning people have erred when interpreting dramatic world events as sure signs of the end time—only to see them fail to develop as anticipated and pass quietly into history. Had they exercised a little more caution, they could have seen that not everything Jesus spoke about was in place at that time. We can see that in hindsight.

Today, more than ever in history, we can see most aspects of the signs Jesus Christ gave present in our world. Yet a few crucial signs of the "time of the end" are still missing. The puzzle remains a little short of some essential pieces.

Other signs mark that time

Jesus foretold other signs that will mark that increasingly threatening time. He said a ruthless persecution against God's people—this time on a worldwide scale—will again emerge: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, betray one another, and hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 24:9-13).

As conditions worsen, frightened people will grow even more fearful and betray each other. In a growing climate of lawlessness and hostility, people will abandon each other and God and His instruction. The devil, having been cast down to the earth and knowing his time is short (Revelation 12:12-17), will try to disrupt God's plans.

Satan will inspire his followers to take control of God's holy city, Jerusalem. "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains . . . For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall

The Time of the End: The End of What?

The Bible speaks of "the time of the end." But exactly what will come to an end?

Many think the reference is to the end of the *world*, especially since the King James Version of the New Testament has Jesus' disciples asking Him about "the end of the world" in Matthew 24:3. But the word translated "world" in this passage is the Greek word *aion* (from which we derive the English word *eon*), signifying "a period of indefinite duration . . . marked by spiritual or moral characteristics" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "Age"). The New King James Version correctly renders the word as "age."

The Greek *aion* and its English derivative *eon* mean essentially the same thing—an age, an epoch, an era. Jesus' disciples were not asking about the end of our physical planet, the earth. Rather, they were inquiring about the end of this era of *man's rule* on the earth. They well knew the many prophecies of the Old Testament that foretell the coming age of the rule of the Messiah in the Kingdom of God.

Paul contrasted the age "which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21) with the world we know, which he called "this present *evil age*" (Galatians 1:4). Spiritually and morally, this age and the age to come are *opposites*.

To properly understand the two, we must realize that *this is not God's*

world. God is not the author of the broken homes, shattered marriages, violence, racial and ethnic hatred, governmental corruption, greed, pollution, depression, disease and persecution and the resultant suffering we see around us. Paul pinpoints the cause of these sorrows as "*the god of this age*" (2 Corinthians 4:4), none other than Satan the devil.

How great is the influence of this being? The apostle John tells us that "*the whole world* lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). All of humanity is influenced by the thinking, attitudes and actions of this wicked being and his evil cohorts, the demons. John further warns that Satan's deceptive power is so great that he "*deceives the whole world*" (Revelation 12:9).

Satan's influence is as powerful as it is pervasive. Odd as it may sound, one of Satan's greatest areas of influence is religion, where *his* ideas—not God's—dominate. Paul warns Christians of Satan's deceptive power even within Christianity: Just as "Satan him-



Photos, from left: Corbis Digital Stock, iStockphoto

be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved . . ." (Matthew 24:15-16, 21-22; compare Revelation 11:2).

Jerusalem has fallen to outside forces before—including the Romans, Arabs and Turks. Jesus foretold that foreign forces will again gain control in a period of unparalleled global crisis. This same period will see the instigation of a war that, if God were not to intervene,

self transforms himself into an angel of light," so do his representatives masquerade as "ministers of righteousness" and "apostles of



the Bible and His way of life as "foolishness" (1 Corinthians 2:14). As a result, mankind does not recognize that it is man's collective rejection of God and His ways that has brought the suffering and sorrow that permeate the world. (To learn more about Satan's evil influence on our world, request or download our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*)

When Scripture mentions "the time of the end" or "the end of the age," it is referring to the coming end of the present *evil age*. This age—in reality *the age of Satan*—will draw to an end, replaced by the age of God's rule over and guidance of all of humanity.

Bible prophecy is not all bad news. Although man's actions will bring the world to the brink of annihilation, the Bible reveals some wonderfully good news: Jesus Christ will return to usher in a paradise on earth in the Kingdom of God.

Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Paul warns those who would live godly lives that they must constantly struggle against unseen spiritual influences dominating the world around them. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of *this age*, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Under Satan's influence, the world has its own "wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:20-29), a way of thinking that considers the God of

This age to come—often referred to in the Bible as the time the Kingdom of God will govern the earth—will be ushered in by Jesus Christ at His return. To better understand these major prophetic themes and events, be sure to request or download your free copies of the booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*, *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. They will help you better understand the unimaginably better world God has in store beyond our present age.

would eventually destroy human life from the planet.

Religious and heavenly signs

Jesus continued with other signs that would mark the end time. He revealed that religious leaders will use Satan's deceptive powers to perform miracles and persuade the world to do their bidding. "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe

Biblical Terms for the Coming End of Man's Age

Some biblical terms have a considerably broader application than the 3½-year time of crisis immediately preceding Jesus Christ's return. This can lead to some confusion should we try to force these terms into a strict end-time-only usage.

The Last Hour: The apostle John, writing in the first century, used the expression "the last hour" in referring to his day: "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).

Like others in his day, John likely thought Jesus Christ's return was imminent (Acts 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). But God has a considerably different perspective of time. A day with Him is like 1,000 years and 1,000 years as one day (2 Peter 3:8; compare Psalm 90:4).

John did warn us to be on the lookout for "antichrists," a term used for any professing to be like Christ but actually working against Him. A trend that began in John's day will continue to the time of the end, when this false representation of Jesus Christ and His teaching will grow worse.

The Latter Times: Paul, Peter, John and Jude use the terms *last days*, *last time*

and *last times* to describe the final part of man's era. Paul warned Timothy that some Christians would leave the truth of God at the time of the end. He called this general future period the "latter times": "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith" (1 Timothy 4:1).

End of the Ages: Hebrews 9:26 uses the phrase "end of the ages" to depict the period from Jesus' sacrifice to His second coming. Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us: "God... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son."

Last Times: Notice Peter's words: "He... was manifest [visible] in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:20). John says: "Little children, it is the last time [because] many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18, King James Version).

Note that Jude also uses the term "last time": "...Remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 17-19).

The Latter Days: The expression "latter days" (Daniel 10:14) can include the "time of the end" (Daniel 11:35), a period leading up to and including the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21). The context of these words and phrases reveals their meaning.

it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:23-24).

To counteract this deception, Christ foretold, His gospel would be faithfully preached to all nations as the end time nears: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

Later, during the final 3½-year period, He will use two of His servants as mighty witnesses for the truth, giving them miraculous powers. "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days [3½ years]... These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire" (Revelation 11:3, 6).

Other dramatic events will mark these final days. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29).

After these astounding events, said Jesus, He will return to earth in power and majesty. "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (verse 30).

The analogy of the budding fig tree

Before concluding, Jesus gave yet another analogy to help us understand that not all catastrophes—wars, famines, plagues or earthquakes—will indicate His imminent return. He compares our observation of the events leading to the end-time crisis to viewing the budding of a fig tree and recognizing that the coming of summer is near.

He said: "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see *all* these things, know that it is near—at the doors!" (verses 32-33). Notice that all these things must be present for the analogy to be valid.

Speaking to those who will see "all these things" develop, Jesus continues: "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (verses 34-35).

As in nature, a false spring can occur. Sometimes the weather warms and seems ready for spring, with some trees even blooming, then a sudden frost does great damage. Similarly, many troubling

world events in the past can be viewed as false springs.

For example, for the first time in history the 20th century saw the eruption of *world wars*. These two devastating world wars caused untold grief and brought death to tens of millions. Yet these wars eventually ended and the world returned to an uneasy truce and relative peace. The occurrence of terribly destructive wars alone is not proof the end time has arrived.

Similarly, history has seen periodic moral swings from abject degradation to stern morality and back again. Such happened in the apostle Paul's day, in the Roman Empire, in the days of the Islamic Empire, in the Renaissance and in our day.

Paul described the deteriorating moral and spiritual values that would permeate the last days: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers



Two devastating world wars in the last century caused untold grief and brought death to tens of millions. Yet these wars eventually ended and the world returned to an uneasy truce and relative peace.

of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Again, the key to determining whether a moral downswing—including the modern one—is part of the moral degradation spoken of by the apostles and prophets is whether the trends steadily increase or ultimately diminish. If they continue intensifying, and are accompanied by the other end-time signs Jesus Christ and the prophets predicted, then the final events may be just around the corner.

Jesus Christ's Olivet Prophecy: Where Are We Now?

Jesus Christ, in His Olivet Prophecy recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, foretold several major trends that would increase and intensify before His return. The trends He emphasized were religious deception, wars, famines, disease epidemics, earthquakes and devastating storms.

This is especially apparent in response to His disciples' inquiry concerning what signs would precede His return and the end of this age.

"Take heed that no one deceives you," He warned. Many would come claiming to represent Him, "and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise



Jesus warned His followers to be on guard against religious fraud masquerading under His name.

against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:4-8).

Are any of these prophesied signs apparent today?

Religious deception and confusion

We have been horrified by the headlines of mass cult suicides such as Jim Jones and his followers in Guyana in 1978 and the Heaven's Gate cult in Southern California in 1997. Another tragic chain of events led to

the deaths of David Koresh's Branch Davidians in Texas in 1993. These tragedies made the news because charismatic leaders led their followers not to life, but to death.

But by no means should we assume this is the only kind of religious deception Jesus intended by His warning. Even in the early days of the Church, Paul warned of "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ ... For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Other apostles also warned of a great religious conspiracy *masquerading as Christianity*. Peter warned of "false teachers ... who will secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). John wrote that even in his day "many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). He also reveals the power behind this great deception—"Satan, who

deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

Some two billion people claim to be Christian. Yet they are divided among thousands of churches and denominations, all claiming to follow Jesus Christ even while they hold to a bewildering variety of



The scourge of war and threat of human annihilation will plague mankind until Jesus Christ returns to establish a kingdom of lasting peace.

contradicting beliefs and practices. Is this the Christianity of the Bible, or is it part of the religious deception and confusion Christ Himself foretold? (For further information, be sure to request or download your free copy of the booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.)

Wars and rumors of wars

World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars, after it took 8 million lives. A generation later World War II claimed almost 10 times as many.

But what about other wars? Hundreds of thousands more have died

since in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia and other countries. Although most rarely made the news, 20 to 30 wars raged at any given time in the late 20th century.

According to some estimates, wars in the 20th century alone killed more people than *all earlier wars combined*.

When the Japanese city of Hiroshima was destroyed by an atomic bomb on Aug. 6, 1945, the commander of the B-29 that carried the deadly payload wielded the power to destroy a medium-sized city. Today the commander of a single nuclear submarine oversees enough destructive power to vaporize more than 150 large cities—quite enough to bring several countries to their knees.

Dozens of such submarines bristling with nuclear weapons prowl the oceans, and that number doesn't begin to include the nuclear warheads that can be rained from other warships,



Widespread famines have taken hundreds of thousands of lives in some African countries in recent years.

aircraft, artillery and silo- or trailer-launched missiles. Jesus said that world conditions at the time of the end would be so menacing that "no living thing could survive" unless He returned (Matthew 24:21-22, REB). Only within recent decades has mankind held the enormous destructive capability to literally exterminate all human life many times over.

What will the last great war before Christ's return bring? According to Jesus Christ's revelation to John (Revelation 9:13-18), well over *a billion* people will be slaughtered. With the development in recent decades of terrifying arsenals of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, such staggering casualties are now a sobering possibility.

Famines

You may remember the headlines of the 1960s and 1970s, when drought and exploding populations led to the starvation of hundreds of thousands in India and Africa. Later we learned that millions had died in China, the Soviet Union, Cambodia and Ethiopia during war's

aftermath and communist takeovers in those countries.

Famine doesn't have to be caused strictly by natural conditions; human beings have been shown to be capable of producing their own famines through ill-founded ideologies, policies and practices. Famine is also a natural consequence of disrupted economies, transportation and normal agricultural cycles during times of war.

Widespread famines have taken hundreds of thousands of lives in African countries in recent years. It appears to be only a matter of time before a surging world population produces another round of drastic food

Did Jesus Christ Foretell Devastating Storms?

In Matthew 24:7-8, Jesus Christ foretold signs that would mark the time leading up to His return: "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places . . ."

We have certainly seen devastating earthquakes in recent years. The December 2004 earthquake off Indonesia was the most powerful in decades, unleashing a massive tsunami that took some 300,000 lives. Less than a year later, an earthquake in southern Asia killed another 30,000.

In Matthew 24:7, the Greek word translated "earthquakes" is *seismos*, from which we derive such English words as "seismology," referring to the study of earthquakes. *Strong's Lexicon* defines it as "a commotion, i.e. (of the air) a gale, (of the ground) an earthquake—earthquake, tempest" (Strong's No. 4578).

So *seismos* has a broader meaning than just the earth shaking. Matthew 8 records how a violent storm overtook Jesus and His disciples on the Sea of Galilee, threatening to capsize their boat and drown them—until Jesus miraculously calmed the winds and waves.

The word used in verse 24 for this powerful

storm is *seismos*, here translated "tempest." So we see that *seismos* can also refer to violent storms and isn't limited strictly to earthquakes. When Jesus foretold "famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places," His words encompass natural disasters that include earthquakes, but can also



apply to hurricanes, tornadoes and other such deadly storms.

As we saw with Hurricane Katrina, these storms can be enormously destructive. Katrina took more than 1,200 lives and caused an estimated \$200 billion in damage, not counting the economic hit from losses to shipping, oil and gas production, fishing and agriculture. New Orleans, devastated by the storm, will not fully recover for decades—if ever.

A hurricane like Katrina, which reached category 5 strength before weakening, can produce winds greater than 155 miles an

Photos, from left: Corel Professional Photos, iStockphoto

shortages. In the last century alone the world population quadrupled to more than 6 billion. Some 80 million new people are being added every year, with another billion people expected to be added every decade.

If the rate of growth continues, the global population will double again in 50 years. What troubles many world leaders and organizations is that most of this growth will occur in countries *least* able to provide food, shelter and clothing for a flood of new arrivals. With so many new mouths to feed, starvation—and accompanying social disruption—will inevitably spread.

hour and push ahead of it a wall of water 18 feet or higher, doing major damage to virtually anything in its path.

Are such natural disasters increasing as Jesus foretold?

The Sept. 16, 2005, issue of *Science* magazine reports on research by scientists

of category 4 and 5 tropical cyclones, *the most intense storms that cause most of the damage on landfall*" (Richard Kerr, "Is Katrina a Harbinger of Still More Powerful Hurricanes?," p. 1807).

Specifically, the frequency of the most dangerous and damaging storms—those rated category 4 and 5—increased by 80 percent from the 1970s to the latest decade.

This should certainly make us sit up and take notice. Later in Jesus Christ's same prophecy, as recorded in Luke 21:25-28, He says: "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things



When Jesus foretold "famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places," His words encompass natural disasters that include earthquakes, but can also apply to hurricanes, tornadoes and other such deadly storms.

at the Georgia Institute of Technology and the National Center for Atmospheric Research. They concluded that while the total number of hurricanes and cyclones had not increased, there has been "a sharp increase during the past 35 years in the number

which are coming on the earth . . .

"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

The situation is so tenuous that weather disruptions in food-producing areas could bring immediate food shortages. An often-overlooked factor in weather patterns is the relationship between people and God.

We have lost sight of the fact that God sometimes intervenes in the weather to bless or curse peoples according to their attitudes and behavior. King Solomon understood this when he prayed: “When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because [the people] have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance” (1 Kings 8:35-36).

As people’s behavior continues to degenerate as the time of the end approaches, other prophecies indicate that drastic changes in weather

“This Generation Will Not Pass”

Many are puzzled by Jesus Christ’s words, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place” (Matthew 24:34).

Did He mean that generation of His disciples? First, note the future context. Jesus had just said, “So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” (verse 33).

Did His disciples “see *all* these things” in their generation? Certainly not. They were not in a generation that had the ability to destroy all of mankind. Jesus said of the final, end-time generation, “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved” (verse 22). Clearly the weapons of that day were not sufficient to bring this prophecy to pass.

Although Christ’s disciples did see wars, famines, plagues and persecutions, and some even lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem several decades later, these were not the total fulfillment of Jesus

Christ’s words. They were not the prophesied global events that would directly lead to Jesus Christ’s return.

So what did Jesus mean when He referred to “this generation”? He could not have meant that current generation of His day. They died without seeing all the events leading to His return. The obvious meaning, then, is that He could only have meant *the generation of the last days*.

Jesus knew that the course of end-time events would not continue indefinitely. Once they were set in motion, all would occur within the lifetime of one generation. Only one generation will witness all the mounting global conditions described in God’s Word. That generation will see the arrival of the specific 3½-year period that will mark the end of “this present evil age” and usher in the Kingdom of God.

These events will not pass from one generation to another. Once the prophesied conditions exist, all will be fulfilled—including the return of Jesus Christ—within the lifetime of one generation. Considering the signs Jesus foretold that would mark that time, it appears to be here.

patterns—and resulting famines—are a tool God will use to get the attention of an increasingly rebellious humanity.

Disease epidemics

Medical researchers have been shocked by a growing development in recent years—the sudden emergence of baffling new diseases and epidemics. AIDS has garnered the most headlines—and rightfully so, since it has devastated entire countries and in sheer numbers has claimed more lives than the Black Death that devastated medieval Europe.

AIDS is only one of the incurable plagues that worry governments and scientists. The exotic-sounding names of such killers as Legionnaires’ disease, Lassa fever, hantavirus, Machupo virus and Ebola belie their deadliness. Some of these have resisted treatment or cure simply because they spread so fast and kill so quickly that scientists are unable to study how they are transmitted.

Equally frightening is the emergence of drug-resistant strains of old scourges such as tuberculosis, bubonic plague and some common bacteria. Other diseases once thought conquered—including malaria and cholera—are springing to life with deadly vengeance. Lest we forget, an unusual strain of influenza killed 20 million people in a worldwide epidemic in 1918 and 1919, taking more lives than were lost on the battlefields of World War I.

The 20th century saw skyrocketing rates of diseases rooted in human behavior, diet and other environmental factors—cancers, sexually transmissible diseases, diabetes, heart disease and cirrhosis of the liver, to name a few.

If these were not enough, keep in mind that the breakdown in the social structure that inevitably results from war and famine will no doubt lead to massive and widespread epidemics. Chemical and biological weapons—such as smallpox and anthrax—are another possibility when we consider how biblical prophecies may be fulfilled.

Earthquakes in various places

Only in recent decades have scientists understood the underlying causes of earthquakes. The crust of the earth, they have discovered, is like a cracked eggshell encasing an interior of liquid magma. The giant pieces of earth’s shell slowly move as they float on the magma. Where the pieces grind against each other, earthquakes and massive volcanoes periodically rock the earth.

Earthquake zones include some of the most densely populated areas of the world—including much of the U.S. West Coast, Italy, southeastern Europe, Turkey, the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia and Japan.

Are earthquakes increasing? It's difficult to make long-term comparisons since modern seismographs have been in use for only just over a century. The Richter scale, which gauges earthquake magnitude, dates only to 1935. Also, far more sensitive instruments are in place today, so many earthquakes are detected that would have gone undocumented in earlier years.

Even so, records from the U.S. National Earthquake Information

Center identify more than 20 quakes in the 20th century that each killed 10,000 or more people, including some monster quakes that took more than 100,000 lives each. Well over a million people have died in earthquakes in the last 100 years.

Literally thousands



One of the signs Jesus predicted would be “earthquakes in various places.” A 1989 earthquake near San Francisco killed 63 and caused \$5.9 billion in damages.

of earthquakes occur daily, although most are so minor they are detected only by instruments. However, almost 1,000 moderate to strong earthquakes (5.0 to 6.9 on the Richter scale) shake our planet in an average year, plus an average of 18 major quakes (7.0 to 7.9) and one massive quake of 8.0 or higher. Jesus Christ's prediction of “earthquakes in various places” certainly describes our time.

Remember, though, that Jesus said “all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet . . . All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:6-8). The many tragedies we see around us are chilling reminders of Christ's words and a foretaste of even greater catastrophes yet to come.

As a result of these terrible things, some of those who survive and remain will eventually be humbled enough to finally repent and accept our Creator's promise of a bright future in the world beyond our age. Only then will the age-old prophecies of a utopian world of peace and plenty find their fulfillment.

The End Time in the Book of Revelation

In the Gospel accounts Jesus gave a brief summary of the events and conditions leading up to His return. But later He filled in many details. Sixty years passed before He revealed more of the specifics about the end time to the apostle John. This long and detailed prophecy is in the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

Here we find again the outline of the prophecy Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives, but represented in extensive symbolism. We also find additional details.

In the first chapter John writes that, in vision, he was taken to the time he called “the Lord's day”—the same period called “the day of the Lord” by earlier prophets and other apostles (Isaiah 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

Vision of the end time

Revelation is a book written to reveal the future, and Jesus Christ is the One who does the revealing: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place . . . Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him” (Revelation 1:1, 7).

Here is the theme of Revelation—the time of the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

John explains where he was when he received this vision of the end time: “I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet” (Revelation 1:9-10).

The Lord's day (also known as “the day of the Lord” or “the day of Christ” throughout Scripture) is the time of God's intervention in human affairs when He establishes His Kingdom. (Plainly in this context it does not refer to a particular day of the week for worshipping God. To better understand which day God has set aside for rest and worship, please download or request our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest.*)

The apostle Paul, referring to this same time, says: “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

In another epistle Paul calls it “the day of Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:2). The reason is that Jesus Christ, the Lord, intervenes in a powerful way at this time to take over the world. This is why this end-time period is called the Lord’s day.

John’s vision of the Lord’s day begins in Revelation 4: “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne” (verse 2). After



describing the scene in heaven, John focuses on a scroll God holds that lists end-time events. “And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals” (Revelation 5:1).

Only Jesus Christ, called the Lamb, is worthy to open the seals and unleash these end-time events. When God the Father determines the time is ready, He authorizes Jesus to initiate the events written on the scroll.

“So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death . . .” The apostle John saw, in a chilling vision, four horsemen symbolizing major trends leading up to Jesus Christ’s return.

They include the terrifying end-time occurrences prophesied throughout the Scriptures to take place during the 3½-year period.

The seven seals describe the events before and during Christ’s return to rule the earth. “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels . . . saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’” (Revelation 5:11-12). Here Jesus Christ is being authorized to unleash the final events and then establish His Kingdom on earth.

Woodcut by Gustave Doré

Christ opens the seven seals

John then describes events and trends to take place during the period before the 3½ years. Jesus opens, in Revelation 6, the seven seals on the scroll of prophecy. The first four of the seven represent events beginning in the days of the apostles and leading up to the time of the end. Jesus gave the meaning of the seals in the Olivet Prophecy about the end time (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21).

The first seal (Revelation 6:1-2) represents widespread deception by a false Christianity that began in the days of the apostles (Matthew 24:4-5). The second seal (Revelation 6:3-4) refers to the increasing devastation caused by war as the end approaches (Matthew 24:6-7). The third seal (Revelation 6:5-6) represents increasing hunger and famines (Matthew 24:7). Other consequences of war and famine are represented by the fourth seal (Revelation 6:7-8)—such things as disease, plagues and civil unrest that kill many people (Matthew 24:7).

All of the events in the first four seals have been occurring, with varying frequency and intensity, from Christ’s time to our day. But they have greatly intensified over the last century and will grow even worse in the suffering mankind will have to endure nearer the end.

The fifth seal (Revelation 6:9-11) brings us directly to the time of the end. It acknowledges the past persecution and martyrdom of God’s servants and announces they will have to wait “a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed,” before God avenges their deaths.

In Matthew 24:9 Jesus tells His followers this will be a time when “they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.” He also describes it as a time of “great tribulation” unlike anything the world has ever experienced (verse 21).

The sixth seal

The next seal describes how “powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matthew 24:29) after the end-time tribulation and martyrdom of the saints has begun but before God’s wrath is unleashed in “the day of the LORD” (Joel 2:31). These heavenly signs announce the beginning of the Day of the Lord.

Terrifying heavenly signs announce Jesus Christ’s direct intervention in world events to save mankind from itself. This shows that, while God has permitted the previous end-time disasters, *Satan* has been their driving force. Now God begins to demolish Satan’s kingdom, pouring out His wrath on a rebellious and insolent world.

“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a

The Population Explosion and Prophecy

According to population experts, it took almost 1,900 years for the world to slowly rise from an estimated 250 million at the time of Christ to a billion and a half at the beginning of the 20th century. Then, in the 20th century alone, the earth's population has exploded as it *quadrupled* in size. It has passed the staggering mark of 6 billion people. In spite of advances in birth control, the world population still rapidly climbs.

A glimpse at the trend shows why many are concerned. According to the United Nations Population Division, it took 123 years to move from 1 billion to 2 billion population. Yet it took only 33 years to reach the 3 billion mark and 14 years to arrive at the 4 billion level. Next it took only 13 years to reach 5 billion, and just 11 years later we crossed the 6 billion mark.

From now on, it is estimated, a billion people will be added every 10 years. Provided this rate of growth—adding some 80 million new people per year—continues, the planet's population will double again in 50 years.

What does this all mean? Is the earth able to sustain this level of population growth without bringing on dire consequences?

Signs of global environmental fatigue

Already the earth is showing serious consequences from this rapid population increase combined with the excessive consumption of the earth's resources. In 1989 the fishing industry reported a dwindling of fish catches in oceans, and the decline has continued. Diminishing reserves of metals, fossil fuels, forests, arable lands, freshwater and wildlife are facts of life.

Pollution has reached a global scale, with hardly any part of the earth free from

contaminated air, water and soil. This is not an extremist view, but what world organizations such as the UN and the Red Cross are regularly reporting.

Perhaps in the United States, Europe and Japan, where funds are available to curb the most damaging effects of the rise in population, there is not so much concern. But these nations comprise only a sixth of the world's



inhabitants. The rest of the world is in a far worse condition.

More famines predicted

The dramatic increase in the world population has placed great strains on the political, military, economic and social systems around the planet. Some relief agencies already consider parts of Africa to be in a chronic state of hunger.

The population explosion is not only a problem of quantity, but of quality—because of varying living standards. While the birth rate in industrialized countries has

plummeted, in backward regions it remains quite high.

It is estimated that 95 percent of population growth will occur in the 130 poorest countries. Already a fourth of the earth's inhabitants live on less than a dollar a day. Yet this is where population growth is greatest. Two countries and one region—China (1.3 billion people), India (1.1 billion) and

Brazil, with 20 million; Karachi, Pakistan, and Mexico City with 19 million; and Jakarta, Indonesia, and Calcutta and Delhi, India, with 17 million. Can these nations, many of them impoverished, continue to provide basic services and enforce the peace as their resources dry up?

Prophecy on the march

How is this related to prophecy? First, according to the end-time scenario described in the book of Revelation, a massive army from east of the Euphrates will cross the river and bring a disastrous world war. "And I heard a voice . . . saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million" (Revelation 9:13-16).

For this prophecy to come to pass, billions of people must exist on the planet for this region to field 200 million able-bodied soldiers. Until the latter part of the 20th century, the nations in this area could not muster even half that number. But now, for the first time in history, they *can* provide such a massive military force.

Also, as world population multiplied in the 20th century, so did the explosion of knowledge, made possible by improved communications, travel and technology. We can easily see the fulfillment of the prophecy God gave to Daniel: "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4).

We take for granted such things as rapid international travel, computers, the Internet and the knowledge explosion, but these were widely available beginning only during the closing years of the 20th century.



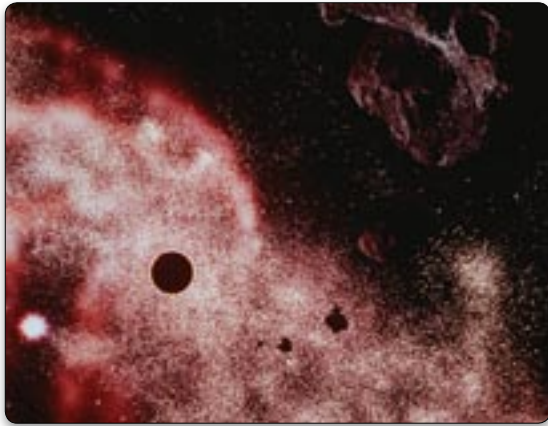
Africa (800 million)—contain half the world's population.

As the population grows, it strains the relations within cities and among nations. More crime, violence and disease will invariably appear as people are increasingly forced to live in cramped and unhealthy quarters.

According to 2001 UN statistics, Tokyo was the world's most populous city, with 26 million. But the UN calculates that in the next 15 years the world's largest cities will be Bombay (Mumbai), India, with 26 million; Lagos, Nigeria, with 23 million; Dhaka, Bangladesh, with 21 million; São Paulo,

great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

“And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (Revelation 6:12-17).



Jesus described this sixth sign in His Olivet Prophecy: “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the

The Book of Revelation describes many frightening trends and events leading up to the end of this age, including terrifying celestial events and horrifyingly destructive weapons and warfare.

heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption [rescue] draws near” (Luke 21:25-28).

Consequently, in the latter part of the 3½ years of Satan’s wrath, God will intervene, first with signs and wonders in the heavens, then by orchestrating His final punishments before Jesus Christ’s return.

The seventh and final seal

Finally the seventh seal is opened (Revelation 8). It describes seven

other aspects of end-time events, each announced with a trumpet blast. In the first four of these plagues God strikes the earth and mankind’s environmental support systems. The fifth trumpet’s plague inflicts great pain on those refusing to serve God. In the sixth trumpet plague, God permits an unimaginably destructive and all-out worldwide war to begin (Revelation 8-9).

With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the Bible reveals that “the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets” (Revelation 10:7).

This mystery of the end time was briefly alluded to in the Garden of Eden and its meaning glimpsed by the patriarchs and prophets. John writes: “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15).

God is in control. Every prophetic detail will be carried out according to His time frame. (To learn much more about this intriguing book, be sure to request our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

As Christ concluded His Olivet Prophecy in Luke 21:34-36, He warned His disciples who would live during the end time: “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass [the terrible end-time events], and to stand before the Son of Man.”

God's Framework for End-Time Prophecy

How should we view prophecy? Can it provide spiritual benefits? The apostle Peter mentioned that prophecy should serve to strengthen our hope and faith in the future. He said: “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts...” (2 Peter 1:19).

Here Peter compared Bible prophecies to a light that provides visibility until the final coming of God's Kingdom, brought by Jesus Christ to earth. When this occurs every eye will see His glory as if it is a great light (Matthew 24:27, 30; Revelation 1:7).

God gives us an outline and sequence of prophetic events, but many specifics remain unclear. Some things we can see clearly,



Several conditions must exist before Jesus Christ returns, according to Bible prophecy. One condition is mankind's ability to annihilate all human life, only possible since the development of nuclear weapons in recent decades.

but others are beyond our understanding at this point in history.

In other words, the Bible provides a reliable framework of prophecy, but it can be counterproductive to try to interpret every yet-to-be-fulfilled detail in the light of our circumstances. Such circumstances could change dramatically before those details come to pass.

So what is the framework of prophecy that remains sure? Among the many prophecies of events leading up to Christ's return, several major prophetic scenarios can be identified and specifically confirmed

PhotoDisc

as they occur. As Peter said, we “do well to heed” them.

First condition: Man's ability to annihilate human life

The first of these certain prophecies deals with a specific condition described by Christ that would be present only as the end time drew near. He said to His disciples: “It will be a time of great distress; there has never been such a time from the beginning of the world until now, and will never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, *no living thing could survive*; but for the sake of God's chosen *it will be cut short*” (Matthew 24:21-22, New English Bible).

Jesus warned that a time would come when mankind would see its destructive capacity grow so awesome that all human life could be annihilated. This is what makes the time of “great distress” so terrifying, unequalled in human history.

Mankind has been fighting wars since the dawn of history. But man never had the ability—with rocks and clubs, bows and arrows, cannons or automatic weapons—to literally exterminate every human being on earth.

This changed in 1945 with the detonation of the first atomic bombs, followed by the development of far more destructive hydrogen bombs. With thousands of nuclear weapons at its disposal, as well as thousands of tons of chemical and biological weapons, humanity has the ability to destroy all human life from the planet many times over.

This situation never existed in history until the latter half of the 20th century. Mankind has never been a great caretaker of the earth, yet never before have we had the capacity to destroy *all* human life. But Christ said that collectively, if left unchecked, we would do exactly that. And this is one of the reasons He must intervene—to save mankind from self-annihilation!

Second condition: The Jewish nation reborn

The second condition that must exist before Christ's return concerns the existence of the modern nation-state of Israel in control of Jerusalem for a time.

The survival of the religion and culture of the ancient Jewish people, who witnessed the rise and decline of such great civilizations as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, goes against the odds.

The fact that they were never assimilated into the nations where they were scattered is unprecedented. A historian of the 19th century, Heinrich Graetz, noted that “a nation which has witnessed the rise and decay of the most ancient empires, and which still continues to hold its place in the present day, deserves the closest attention.”

The French emperor Napoleon is reported to have been passing near a synagogue when he heard weeping inside. When he asked, “What is this crying?,” he was told the Jewish people were weeping over the destruction of their temple. Impressed, Napoleon said, “A people that longs so

much for its city and its temple are bound to restore them one day!”

That prediction has partially come to pass. Now the Jews—descendants of the ancient kingdom of Judah—again are in possession of Jerusalem, and their “weeping” takes place on the western side of the Temple Mount, at the retaining wall for the



The second condition that must exist before Christ’s return concerns the existence of the modern nation-state of Israel in control of Jerusalem for a time.

vast platform Herod the Great constructed to support the rebuilt temple. There, at the Western Wall, many Jews still cry and bemoan the loss of their temple and pray for its restoration. Thus the place is also sometimes aptly called the Wailing Wall.

Christ described conditions under which, as the end time approached, Jews would again control Jerusalem and the “holy place.” Later He said the holy place would be desecrated. He stated, “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:15-16). The abomination of desolation, described in Daniel 8-12, deals with the defiling of the holy place in Jerusalem.

Before 1948 this seemed impossible. The Jews had been scattered for close to 2,000 years, and the Arabs had controlled the Holy Land for centuries. Jews did not have the military power, unity or backing of most of the world to come to their ancient homeland. Many books were written about the overwhelming odds against Zionism, the attempt to establish a Jewish homeland. Yet a Zionist state was established.

Once the fledgling nation of modern Israel was founded in 1948, it

appeared that its inhabitants would never control Jerusalem, and the populous Arab nations surrounding her pledged they would never allow it. Yet in the Six-Day War of 1967, the state of Israel took possession of all of Jerusalem. But the Israelis allowed control of the Temple Mount, the platform on which the temple had stood, to remain in the hands of Arab Muslims.

Since Arab Muslims control the Temple Mount, or the “holy place” that Christ referred to in His prophecy, there is still a part of the prophecy that has not been fulfilled. Since 1989 organized efforts have continued to prepare for the building of a new temple. From 1990 on, certain Israeli Jews have tried to place the first stone of a new temple on the Temple Mount, to no avail. Police and Muslim authorities have prohibited their entry onto the Mount, yet the resolve is there.

That is how matters stand. Christ’s prophecy has been partially accomplished, with Israel in control of Jerusalem, but with other parts of His prophecy waiting to be fulfilled.

Third condition: A new superpower to emerge

The third prophecy deals with the latter revival of the Roman Empire, prophesied extensively in Daniel and Revelation.

Daniel, interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of



Speaking of the fourth and final kingdom, the Roman Empire, Daniel said it would be “strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes; that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.”

a colossal human image, spoke of a series of “kingdoms” to arise on the world scene. The first of these, said Daniel, was the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar himself (Daniel 2:28-38). It was to be followed by three other kingdoms (verses 39-40). Comparing history with other prophecies, we can understand that these four kingdoms were, in order, the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian and Roman empires.

Speaking of the fourth and final kingdom, the Roman Empire, Daniel

said it would be “strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others” (verse 40). Rome indeed proved to be more dominant and enduring than its predecessors, swallowing up their remnants in a reign that lasted for centuries.

However, Daniel also revealed fascinating prophetic details of this kingdom. He said the legs and feet of the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream represented a kingdom, later shown to be the Roman Empire. The image had feet and toes composed “partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron.” This indicated that “the kingdom shall be divided” and “partly strong and partly fragile.” Also, “just as iron does not mix with clay,” the



The Bible is the inspired Word of God and the prophecies of the Bible will come to pass regardless of whether we understand them.

components of this kingdom would not adhere firmly together for long (verses 41-43).

Then, describing Jesus Christ’s return and His overthrow of all human kingdoms and governments, Daniel says, “in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed... it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (verse 44).

The Bible prophesies that a group of 10 “kings,” or national leaders, through alliances or other arrangements will give rise to a union that will fulfill these end-time predictions. Daniel’s prophecy indicates these leaders will preserve their cultures and languages, so it will not be one integrated group of states, such as the United States, but 10 individual political and cultural entities united for a common purpose. Some will be much stronger than the others.

Notice that the book of Revelation gives more details: “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but

they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen and faithful” (Revelation 17:12-14).

The current moves to expand and solidify the European Union appear to be a precursor to this prophesied power. It is interesting to let history reveal the roots of the movement to unify Europe.

In the Jan. 29, 1996 issue of *Newsweek*, Michael Elliot reported: “In January 1957, six nations signed a treaty on the site of the ancient Roman Capitol, and brought into being the European Economic Community... An aide to Paul-Henri Spaak, the then Belgian foreign minister, remembers that his boss said, ‘Do you think that we have laid the first stone of a new Roman Empire?’ Recalls the aide, ‘We felt very strongly we were Romans that day.’”

Certainly the idea of establishing a new Roman Empire was on the minds of the founders of the current organization of European nations. It has continued to prosper as barriers to integration tumble and greater cooperation and unity in economic and military affairs come about. Time will tell where these trends will lead—and how quickly.

The prophetic connection

Where does this leave us?

With mankind possessing the capacity to destroy all human life in several ways, with Israel in control of Jerusalem and a desire among some Israelis to restore the temple and sacrifices, and with a strong and determined effort afoot to unify the nations of Europe, we would do well to heed the warnings of biblical prophecy and not ignore its connection with world conditions.

These scenarios appear to be the most likely way various prophecies of Daniel and Revelation could be fulfilled in light of current conditions. In any event, prophecies of the Bible *will* come to pass whether or not we understand them in every detail. In the meantime we should heed Jesus Christ’s warning in Matthew 24:44: “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Preparing for the End Time

Approximately a fourth of the Bible is prophetic in nature. Much of this material is profoundly connected to world-changing events. The Bible is a perennially up-to-date, applicable book.

Regarding earth-shaping trends and occurrences, no section of Scripture is more applicable to our world than the Olivet Prophecy, recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. This is where Jesus Himself warns us to be vigilant about our spiritual state. He describes and summarizes the conditions and events that will lead to His second coming. What should we be doing—or *not* doing—as that time draws closer?

After describing the dire state of the world to which He would return, Jesus said to His disciples regarding the exact time of His coming, “But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mark 13:32, New American Standard Bible).

That we will not know for sure does not mean we should neglect to keep a watchful eye on world trends and conditions and our own spiritual condition. Notice what Jesus instructs in the next verse: “Take heed, *keep on the alert*, for you do not know when the appointed time is” (verse 33, NASB).

He then compared Himself and His second coming to a man who traveled to a distant country, left his servants in charge of his property and asked the doorkeeper “to stay on the alert” till he returned.

Then Jesus Christ gives His warning to His disciples a second time. “Therefore, *be on the alert*—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming...” (verse 35, NASB).

Next He warns His servants not to fall asleep on the job, followed by a third and final appeal emphasizing the importance of their task. “And what I say to you I say to all: ‘*Be on the alert!*’” (verse 37, NASB).

Luke’s account emphasizes our personal conduct, with Christ warning us to be diligent in keeping our personal spiritual house in order and showing us exactly the kind of distractions to avoid:

“Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day [of Christ’s return] come upon you suddenly like a trap; for it *will* come upon all those who dwell on the face of the earth” (Luke 21:34-35, NASB).

The vast majority of people, says Jesus Christ, *will be taken by surprise*.

They will not be spiritually alert, much less aware, as prophesied conditions and trends develop. Christ wants His servants to avoid falling into this trap.

So He tells us in verse 36: “But *keep on the alert at all times*, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (NASB).

In his exhortation regarding the Day of the Lord, the apostle Peter asks, “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be *in holy conduct and godliness?*” (2 Peter 3:11, NASB). The emphasis throughout is on the



Much of the Bible is prophecy, and of those prophecies concern the end of this age and a glorious new age to begin at Jesus Christ’s return.

importance of *personal preparedness* for Christ’s coming and having a heightened alertness and anticipation of that event.

Protection for God’s servants

One of the most encouraging aspects of this subject is knowing that God has promised to watch over and care for His people during this time of unprecedented worldwide turmoil. Jesus said there is nothing wrong with wanting to avoid suffering the end-time disasters. In fact, as we saw in Luke 21:36, He encourages us to be alert and aware, watching our own spiritual state as well as world events and conditions and earnestly praying we will be worthy to escape the coming devastation, if it occurs during our lifetime.

Just as in Noah’s day, God will provide a way for many of the faithful to be protected during those 3½ years. As Zephaniah 2:3 tells us, “Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD’s anger.”

Although Satan will try to destroy God’s people, God will provide the means for many of them to be spared this dangerous time (Revelation 12:13-17). Jesus says He will care for those who faithfully serve Him during that time.

He tells one faithful group at the end, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

In Revelation 7, God’s servants are sealed and spared from the coming global upheavals. “Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads’” (verses 2-3).

Who are these servants of God? Notice how the book of Revelation describes them. They are those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus,” those “who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” and “those who do His commandments” (Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 22:14).

The book of Revelation shows that those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus are God’s people. (To learn more about these commandments and the people who comprise God’s Church, download or request your free copies of our booklets *The Ten Commandments* and *The Church Jesus Built*.)

Yet, sadly, prophecy reveals that not all of God’s people will be protected during the end time. Christ foretold that part of His Church at the end would not be spiritually ready. In Matthew 25 His parable of the 10 virgins shows that some of His people would neglect their spiritual state and be unprepared.

He concludes the parable with this warning: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13). Consequently, as the end time begins, some of God’s people will be protected from Satan’s persecutions while others bear the brunt of the devil’s fury (Revelation 6:9-11; 12:14, 17).

A time to be spiritually awake

Although the end time is a period of unprecedented world trouble, it is also the threshold of God’s Kingdom. Paul gives a wonderful perspective of how we should spiritually prepare for that time, regardless of when it comes:

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.

“But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the

breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:4-11, NASB).

We should take great comfort in God’s promises and the knowledge He has made available about the end time. The good news is that, if we prepare ourselves spiritually, this can be a time of confidence, hope and joy leading inexorably to God’s incomparable Kingdom. As Jesus assures us in Luke 21:28, “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, *because your redemption draws near.*”

What Can You Do?

In light of the many prophecies about the end of this age, what can you do? What should you do?

When informed about a recent grisly tragedy, Jesus Christ responded by saying to those around Him: “Do you suppose that these [men] were worse sinners than all other[s], because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; *but unless you repent you will all likewise perish*” (Luke 13:2-3).

Understand the gravity of your relationship with your Creator. God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). We must turn from our ways, which are bringing the world to the brink of disaster, and turn to Him.

Prove for yourself that the Bible is God’s Word.

Find out where He is working, and see how God may be leading you to become more involved. To begin, you should download or request our free booklets *Is the Bible True?* and *How to Understand the Bible*.

You should study the prophecies of your Bible and how they relate to national and

world trends. Request our other booklets on prophecy and our free *World News and Prophecy* newsletter to better understand what God reveals about current events and His coming Kingdom. Jesus tells us, “...When you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door” (Matthew 24:33, NASB).

Be sure to subscribe to *The Good News* magazine. Each issue helps you understand the world scene in the light of Bible prophecy and shows you how to apply God’s Word in your life. Realize that “now it is high time to awake out of sleep” (Romans 13:11). Also subscribe to our free *Bible Study*

Course. Its easy-to-follow lessons will take you through the major themes and teachings of the Bible.

Most important, consider and follow God’s words in

Isaiah 55:6-7: “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”



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