

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #12: WHAT WILL LIFE ON EARTH BE LIKE WHEN CHRIST RETURNS?

By John Temples

It's hard not to think about the end of time, especially if you are a Christian. Almost every week or so, some sensational headline, book, or movie portends "the end of life as we know it." Various scenarios for earth's demise have been proposed, including:

- Nuclear holocaust--a world war that wipes out all mankind.
- Global warming (I won't mention that just 40 years ago, scientists were predicting that an impending ice age would do us all in).
- A direct hit by a comet or asteroid.
- Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, dimming of the sun, alien invasions, etc., etc.
- Plagues, pandemics, and pestilence, such as Coronavirus.

The Bible does teach that the earth will cease to exist at some point. It makes two things clear:

- The earth has a finite lifespan. Psalms 102:25-27 says the earth will "wax old like a garment" and perish. Jesus spoke of heaven¹ and earth passing away in Matthew 5:18 and 24:35..
- The end of the world will be preceded by and precipitated by the return of the Lord.

It's natural to think about these things, and to wonder: What will life be like just before Christ returns? What will that generation be like? What if we are that generation?

That's a fair question, and it can be answered to some degree. I'm not talking about the wild speculations of men, but rather, What does the Bible say? Here are some Biblical truths about life on the earth at the end.

¹ Air and space, not the heaven where God dwells.

FIRST: THE BIBLE CLEARLY TEACHES THAT THERE WILL BE PEOPLE (INCLUDING CHRISTIANS) ON EARTH WHEN CHRIST RETURNS

1 Thessalonians 4:15 says, “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that *we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord* will by no means precede those who are asleep.” Revelation 1:7 assures us, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and *every eye will see Him....*” So--no nuclear holocaust, no mass annihilation of mankind by a plague or celestial calamity, no climate change getting weather so far out of whack that it destroys all life.

SECOND: NOT ONLY WILL THERE BE PEOPLE HERE WHEN THE LORD COMES, BUT LIFE WILL BE GOING ON AS USUAL AT THE TIME

In Matthew 24:36 *ff.*, Jesus gave some details about His second coming. He compared that time to the period just before the Flood: “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. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.... Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him” (Matthew 24:37-44).

Notice the allusions to existing human institutions and activities:

- “*Eating and drinking.*” Social and cultural activities will be normal and the food supply chain intact.
- “*Marrying and giving in marriage.*” True Biblical marriage is increasingly under assault, but at least this is some assurance.
- “*Two men will be in the field.*” Agricultural systems will be intact.
- “*Two women will be grinding at the mill.*” Business and commerce will be going on as usual.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 even suggests that when Christ comes, it will be a period of calmness and stability: “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....”

Three times in Matthew 24, Jesus told us that there will be no warning of His coming:

- “They did not know until the flood came and took them away--so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (verse 39).
- “You do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (verse 42).
- “The Son of Man is coming when you do not expect Him” (verse 44).

What are all these Bible references telling us? That at the end, *nothing is going to be out of whack, no worldwide extreme conditions or shortages that would indicate that the Lord’s return is imminent.*

WHAT ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE OR GLOBAL WARMING?

While earth’s weather goes through cycles and extremes, we have ironclad Biblical promises that weather and other natural systems will be operating normally when Christ returns. Recall the Matthew 24 references to eating and drinking, men working in the field, and people working in the mill--all implying that weather systems will be within normal limits. And Genesis 8:22 says, “*While the earth remains [that is, right up until the end], seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.*”

So we have assurances from God’s word that:

- All the cultural, agricultural, and commercial institutions of earth will be functional until the end of time.
- The infrastructure of human existence will be up and running.
- Earth’s weather will continue through its normal cycles right up until the end.

WHAT ABOUT PLAGUES SUCH AS CORONAVIRUS?

Doomsday “prophets” are working overtime to spread fear about the Coronavirus being a sign of the end of time. Here is a sampling of their postings:

- “The world is now spiraling downward, towards the long prophesied period leading up to the chaotic end.” (Christian Media Daily News)
- “Jesus related to His disciples that future ‘famines and pestilences’ will be part of the signs of the times and end of the age (Luke 21:11). Communicable diseases and certain pandemics (not unlike Ebola and the coronavirus) may be expected in our broken world during the last days (as in Rev. 18:4-8), but ‘it will turn out for you as a testimony for you’ (Luke 21:13)... Disease and death will be increasingly common in the last days as we await our Lord's return.”
(<https://www.charismamag.com/spirit/prophecy/44356-if-coronavirus-is-an-end-times-sign-we-shouldn-t-be-surprised>)
- “Bible prophecies clearly state there will be widespread disease epidemics as the end of the age approaches (Matthew 24:7; Luke 21:11). The massive-scale quarantines provide some insight into what this coming calamitous period could be like.”
(<https://www.tomorrowworld.org/news-and-prophecy/coronavirus-and-prophecy>)

There are two clear Biblical indicators that these “end-time prophecies” are false:

First: We have Biblical promises that climate will continue within normal limits to the end of time (Genesis 8:22) and that earthly life will be relatively calm and stable at the time of Jesus's return (see discussion above). Modern preachers describe the “end times” as “chaotic...spiraling downward...calamitous.” Jesus says things will be stable, life will be normal, and social, commercial, and agricultural systems will be intact. Which will we believe?

Second: the doomsday prophets misuse and misapply the Biblical predictions of widespread famines, pestilences. As you can see from the citations above, they are fixated on Matthew 24 and Luke 21. In both places, the subject of Jesus's declarations of widespread suffering, plagues, earthquakes, etc. is not His second coming, but rather the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century. In both texts,

after Jesus gave these predictions, He said that “THIS GENERATION” (the generation of people then living) would not pass away until ALL THOSE THINGS were fulfilled (Matthew 24:34, Luke 21:32). He further connected the chaotic conditions with the need for His followers to flee to the mountains (when the Lord returns, what difference will it make to flee to the mountains?) and with an assault on Jerusalem by armies (Luke 21:20). All this was fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies in AD 70. The Lord does talk about His second coming in this context, but only after the texts we have just discussed. A further proof of the fact that there are two “comings” of the Lord under discussion is that Jesus speaks of the period before the AD 70 destruction as “those days” and the time of His second coming as “that day and hour” (see Matthew 24:22, 29, 36, 42).

WHAT ABOUT SPIRITUAL CONDITIONS WHEN CHRIST RETURNS?

Unfortunately, the spiritual forecast is not nearly as bright as the physical one. Several Scriptures indicate that the church will be under great stress and true faith will be at a low ebb.

Go back to Matthew 24:37-42. Jesus said that at His coming, things would be like they were in the days of Noah, just before the Flood. Jesus could have picked from many periods of history to illustrate conditions at the end--why did He pick the time of Noah?

Because both the cultural and the spiritual state of man at that time furnished an appropriate analogy for conditions at earth’s end. The Bible tells us that in the days of Noah, no one noticed anything unusual in regard to weather, food supplies, etc. but that “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.... The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:5, 11). Not a pretty picture.

How does Peter describe the religious situation at the end of time? He says the world will be overrun with scoffers and people hostile to Christianity. “Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

There is an ominous plaint of Jesus tucked away in a parable. Toward the end of the parable of the unjust judge, Jesus said, “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). I’m afraid that He was suggesting that there will not be a lot of it (faith) at the end. Not that there won’t be ANY faith--the Bible assures us the church will be here until the end--but faith will be greatly curtailed.

Concerning Luke 18:8, Burton Coffman says, “These words are variously understood, but there seems to be a definite foretelling of the decline of faith before the end.” Commentator Albert Barnes also said, “The danger is not that God will be unfaithful—He will surely be true to His promises. But the danger is that His elect—His afflicted people—will be discouraged; will not persevere in prayer; will not continue to have confidence in Him; and will, under heavy trials, sink into despondency.”

This agrees with another saying of Jesus in Matthew 24:45-51. There, Jesus spoke of two kinds of servants: wise and wicked. The wicked servant begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunkards. And why does he do this? “The evil servant says in his heart, *My master is delaying his coming*” (Matthew 24:48). There is a picture here of the Lord’s servants growing discouraged, turning on their fellow servants, and deserting their Master as the time drags on and evil waxes worse and worse.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION TELLS US THAT SATAN WILL GREATLY INCREASE HIS ATTACKS ON THE CHURCH SHORTLY BEFORE THE END

Revelation 20:1-3 speaks of Satan’s being restrained from using human governments (“the nations”) to persecute the church for part of earth’s history. It is my belief that we are, or have been, in that period for some time. Satan can still tempt us individually, but generally the church has enjoyed protection from societal hostility and government persecution for quite a while.

However, verse 3 says, “But after these things he [Satan] must be released for a little while.” The warning is repeated in verses 7 and 8: “Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle....”

It is my view that we are in the early stages of “Satan’s little time” now. Notice how the forces of evil are increasingly able and willing to use *human governments and laws* (“the nations”) to persecute and punish Christianity.

This is not a very heartening picture of spiritual conditions at the end of time. But forewarned is forearmed. The Lord is telling us two things through His word:

- Life is going to be increasingly discouraging and maybe even dangerous for Christians, spiritually speaking.
- And things will get so bad that *it may seem as if the Lord is not coming*.

However, we have three promises:

First, the true church will be intact, and the gospel preached, until the very end. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He told us to go and make disciples of all the nations; and He said, “Lo, I am with you *always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). The kingdom will be delivered up to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Second, our Lord will uphold and sustain us in our individual walks until the very end. 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 speaks of Christians “waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who will also confirm you to the end*, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Disease and death may ravage our bodies, but no earthly or Satanic forces can touch our souls if we remain true to Christ.

Third, Satan will do his worst but will not win. Revelation 20, the same text that warns us of Satan’s release just before the end, tells us that “they [the forces of evil] went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints

and the beloved city. *And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them*" (Revelation 20:9).

Some closing thoughts: "When the Son Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" When the Lord returns, what will He be interested in seeing? What will He be looking for? Will He marvel at what we humans have accomplished with all our technology and innovation? Will He be amazed at our social progress? Or will He be impressed to see how many megachurches we have built, or how many people who have lived on earth have called Him Lord? Folks, when Christ returns, He is going to be looking for one thing: FAITH. May each of us resolve that if He comes in our lifetime, He will find it in us. --John Temples