

## End Times

### 5. What Can We Expect While We Are Waiting?

#### A. Trouble and wickedness

##### 1. Natural disasters

Disasters of three types—geological, atmospheric and biological—are to be expected as time passes. “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” {Romans 8:22}

- a. Earthquakes & volcanic eruptions – The ground itself will rebel against man’s wickedness, creating crumbling hills, sink holes, lava flows, and tsunamis.
- b. Storms – The atmosphere will churn up hurricanes, tornadoes, and blizzards. Weather patterns will become unstable, destroying crops and buildings.
- c. Disease & plague – Bacteria and viruses will attack mankind. Their ability to mutate will threaten large numbers of people and challenge scientific efforts to contain them.
- d. Climate change – In addition to the individual dangers posed by the natural processes listed above, these processes can happen simultaneously, changing whole ecosystems or even the environment of major parts of the earth.

##### 2. War

There is always a plausible reason, at least in some people’s minds, for a war, so wars will occur. Jesus said, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” {Matthew 24:6-7a}.

- a. Wealth and land – Plundering others and taking their resources is the underlying cause of most wars. Arable land, fresh water, and other natural resources are limited in most areas, so having control of them is important for economic prosperity.
- b. Political leverage – Rulers are more popular if they fight “just wars” because military necessity unites people for a common good. Propaganda is used to deceive one’s citizens into fighting an “evil” enemy and in the process giving the government greater control over internal affairs.
- c. Religion and culture – People try to maintain their own religion or culture by imposing it on others. In the process, the religion or the culture are often irretrievably altered.

##### 3. Anxiety

It is inherent in our sinful nature to fuss and fret. Moreover, the world about us gives us plenty of reasons to doubt our own ability to handle the challenges of living in a corrupted world.

- a. Our daily needs – We may have concerns about our immediate needs: “What will we eat?” “What will we drink?” “What will we wear?” “Where will we live?” Jesus said not to worry about such things because “Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all” (Matthew 6:32).
- b. The turmoil of life – The storms of life may overwhelm when we see no path to security. The disciples cried out, “‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing.’ And he [Jesus] said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?’” (Matthew 8:25–26).

#### 4. False teaching and apostasy

The devils never sleep and are always looking for ways to undermine the church. Over the years they have developed a playbook, which has been remarkably successful and which they have used repeatedly. Humans are extremely gullible and will repeat the same errors that they have recognized and denounced in previous generations. Jesus said, “Many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray” {Matthew 24:10-11}.

- a. Abandoning the faith – Many people are religious only because it is to their advantage to be religious. When that advantage disappears, their faith and their participation also disappear. “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” {2 Timothy 4:10a}.
- b. Corrupted Christianity – Digging into God’s Word is tedious and boring to many people, including many scholars. “New” human ideas are much more interesting and offer more possibilities, and “feel good” religion is more appealing. “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” {2 Timothy 4:3-4}.
- c. False Christianity – Pseudo-Christianity, such as the Mormons, the Jehovah Witnesses, and Islam, rely on a single prophet who is supposed to have received a new revelation which radically alters the teachings of the Scriptures while arguing that it worships the same God. Jesus said, “If anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it” {Matthew 24:23–26}.

#### 5. Persecution of Christians

Times when those believing the Bible are not persecuted are the rare times, not the usual. Jesus said, “You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake” {Luke 21:16-17}.

- a. Physical persecution – Christians are physically harmed at the direction of the authorities or with their tacit permission. In some area where there is limited government control, gangs carry out persecution against Christians, particularly in Africa and Asia.
- b. Social persecution – Christians are socially shunned and pressured to abandon their faith through ridicule. In recent times many Christians have attempted to avoid social persecution by generalizing their faith. If they feel that if they don’t admit to believing in anything controversial, they can keep their faith and avoid persecution, but they have already abandoned their faith by making it unoffensive.
- c. Financial persecution – Christians and their organizations are taxed more than others or prevented from performing parts of their ministry through financial requirements. In Islamic countries, Christians may have to pay a tax to practice their faith. Sometimes employers try to limit the practice of Christianity by work schedules or requirement to participate in activities that are anti-Christian.

#### 6. The final struggle

As the world becomes more developed, it is natural for it to become more corrupt. Societies tend to prosper when they have a strong work ethic based on a commonly accepted moral code, but as they become more prosperous, they begin to think that they have a right to that prosperity and grow lax in their recognition of the values that gained them that prosperity.

- a. The danger of prosperity – Man looks more and more to his own abilities and less and less to God. God warned the Israelites about worshipping their prosperity. “And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deuteronomy 6:10–12).
- b. The craving for security – Everyone craves a secure place to live. That longing can place Christians into the position of abandoning their LORD to have the wealth and security that the world has and give up the hardships and earthly uncertainty that Jesus calls us to accept. “Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’” (Luke 9:58).

#### 7. The very end

Christians should expect that as the very last days arrive, the world will try to eradicate Christianity as it tries to eradicate disease. This may happen by physical persecution of Christians or through a corrupting of the church so that genuine Christians have no place to hear and study God’s Word.

- a. The Battle of Armageddon {Revelation 16:16} – Because Revelation is written in terms of spiritual pictures instead of physical predictions, we recognize that the Battle of Armageddon is a spiritual battle where the hosts of hell will throw their whole arsenal of weapons against those Christians who remain faithful to the LORD, but we know they will fail. Jesus assured us that His church was founded on Himself, namely, “Christ, the Son of the Living God.” He said, “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” {Matthew 16:18}.
- b. The final battle – Moreover, the peoples of the world will attempt in some way to form a common front against Biblical Christianity. “For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty” {Revelation 16:14}.
- c. The “little season” {Revelation 20:3b} – At the very end Satan can be expected to make one final push to end the church on earth and leave the LORD’s spiritual kingdom in ruins. “And if the LORD had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days” {Mark 13:20}.

#### B. The endurance of God’s rule

##### 1. Physical blessings

- a. Seedtime and harvest – The earth will continue to produce large quantities of food and goods to supply mankind. “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” {Genesis 8:22}. Certainly, this does not mean that we should abuse the productive land and other resources that God has given us, but that good stewardship of God’s resources will continue to be rewarded.

- b. Technology will advance – From the earliest time the LORD has given even to evil people the ability to develop the technology to improve human civilization. “Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron” {Genesis 4:22a}. God has blessed mankind with incredible opportunities to learn about and to improve his environment.
- 2. Spread of the Gospel
  - a. Great Commission – We have the LORD’s direction to spread His Word. Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” {Matthew 28:19-20a}. This commission gives man the wonderful opportunity to work as a partner of God.
  - b. Promise of success – The LORD’s Word will be effective. “So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” {Isaiah 55:11}. This does not mean that everywhere the Gospel is preached that there will be crowds of converts. Sometimes our preaching merely establishes the standard by which people will be judged.
  - c. Inhibition of Satan – Satan will be restrained so the missionary work of the church can proceed as Christ directed it to be done. “And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended” {Revelation 20:2-3a}.
- 3. Blessings for the church
  - a. The mission will be accomplished – The LORD will help the church to reach the whole world. “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” {Matthew 24:14}. Even when the church seems to be shrinking rather than growing, the success of the harvest is always in the LORD’s hands.
  - b. The church will not fall – Built on the rock of Jesus Christ the church cannot be overcome by any foe. Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” {Matthew 16:18}. By Christ’s return, the church will have reached all the elect, and the Holy Spirit will have brought them to faith.
  - c. Our salvation is sure – We have the Holy Spirit working to preserve us in faith. “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” {Ephesians 1:13-14}.
- 4. Comfort of Revelation
  - a. Individual Christians – Christians are protected from the demons of the Abyss (hell). “They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” {Revelation 9:4}. Because God has a detailed plan for the salvation of each of the elect, He will not let them be destroyed.
  - b. The church – God will prepare a place of safety for the church, represented by the woman, in a hostile environment while the earth endures. “The woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days” {Revelation 12:6}. The LORD will never let it cease to exist even though it often seems to be in great peril.