

Are We Living in the
Time of the End?



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WORLDWIDE MAILING ADDRESSES

United States:

United Church of God,
an International Association
P.O. Box 541027
Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796
Fax: (513) 576-9795
Web site address: www.ucg.org

Australia:

United Church of God–Australia
GPO Box 535
Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
Phone: 07 55 202 111
Free call: 1800 356 202
Fax: 07 55 202 122
Web site address:
www.ucg.org.au
E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

Bahamas: United Church of God
P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: (242) 324-3169
Fax: (242) 364-5566

British Isles: United Church of God
P.O. Box 4052
Milton Keynes, Bucks, MK13 7ZF, England
Phone: 0181-386-8467
Fax: 01257-453978
Web site address: www.goodnews.org.uk

Canada: United Church of God–Canada
Box 144, Station D
Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada
Phone: (416) 231-9379, (800) 338-7779
Fax: (416) 231-8238
Web site address: www.ucg.ca

Fiji: United Church of God
P.O. Box 10-577, Nadi Airport, Fiji
Phone: 723-678

French-speaking areas:

Église de Dieu Unie – France
B.P. 51254
45002 Orléans Cedex 1 France

Germany:

Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten
Postfach 30 15 09
D-53195 Bonn, Germany
Phone: 0228-9454636
Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy:

La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita
Casella Postale 187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy
Phone: 0039-035583474
Fax: 0039-035582140
Web site address: www.labuonanotizia.org

New Zealand: United Church of God
P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1015, New Zealand
Phone: Toll free 0508-463-763

South Africa:

United Church of God
P. O. Box 2209
Beacon Bay East London 5205
Phone and fax: 043 748-1694
E-mail: ucgrsaoffis@mweb.co.za

Spanish-speaking areas:

United Church of God
P.O. Box 458, Big Sandy, TX 75755, U.S.A.
Phone: (903) 636-4928

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Author: Mario Seiglie

Contributing writers: Scott Ashley, Jerold Aust, Roger Foster, John Ross Schroeder

Editorial reviewers: John Bald, Jim Franks, Bruce Gore, Roy Holladay,
John Jewell, Paul Kieffer, Graemme Marshall, Burk McNair, Richard Thompson,
Leon Walker, Donald Ward, Lyle Welty, Dean Wilson



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 expounded 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 disappointments, they haven't put an end to attempts to associate world events and conditions with biblical predictions 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 no human beings would be spared "unless those days were shortened" (Matthew 24:22). Did He have our time in mind?

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

Much confusion surrounds the timing of these prophecies. This need not be so. The Bible itself reveals certain vital keys that will help us place these predictions 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 intriguing days they refer to as the time of the end.

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. Other stones were carved of beautiful white marble. 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' dogmatic 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 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 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 plain 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 perceive important prophetic principles.

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 Jesus' Olivet

Prophecy 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 anguish. 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 of the most succinct explanations of the time of the end is in the book of Daniel. In chapter 12 God reveals to Daniel a summary of major events to take place at the end time.

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, 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" (Daniel 12:1-4, emphasis added throughout).

Here the end time is described as "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 term *time of the end* refers primarily to a period of unparalleled world trouble lasting 3½ years (in biblical language, "a time [a year], times [two years] and half a time [half a year]") and will conclude with the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. This booklet focuses essentially on prophecies directly or indirectly related to the 3½-year period at the close of "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4).

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.

Christ cautioned His disciples to be careful if they thought they were witnessing the signs of the end of the age. He said, "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them. But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified, for these things must come to pass first, but *the end will not come immediately*" (Luke 21:8-9).

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 determine 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

Noah and Our Time: A Sobering Parallel

Jesus Christ used the example of Noah to reveal 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).

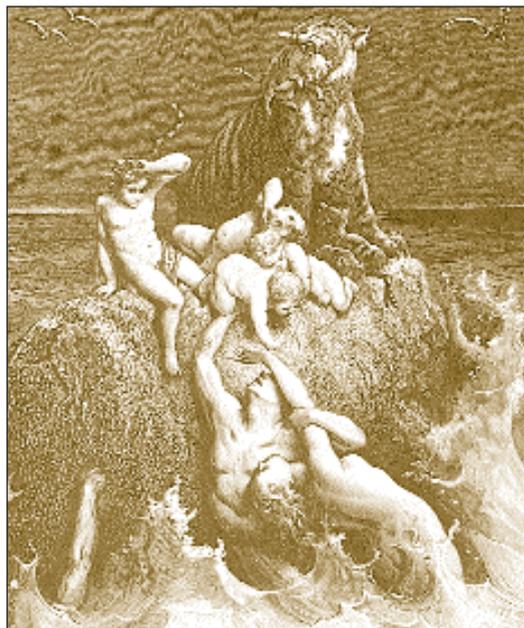
This is history and prophecy working together. Their meaning is clear: The attitude of people in Noah's day would prevail again just before Christ's second coming. To both groups God seemed far away, virtually unconcerned about human activities on earth, and life appeared to go on as it always had (2 Peter 3:3-6). These people would be unconcerned as 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 neglect to seek their Creator (Matthew 6:33; Luke 21:34-35). It happened before, and it is happening again.

The apostle Paul commented to Timothy about other carnal attitudes and activities that would characterize the last 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 a form of godliness, but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

This perfectly describes the dominant attitude and

outlook of our age. Such attitudes will prevent the vast majority of humanity from believing God and the biblical warning signs until all havoc breaks loose. Like the people in Noah's time who laughed and mocked his building an ark, the end of this age will come when the overwhelming majority are unprepared.



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.

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 many 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 that the focus of end-time predictions is primarily on a specific 3½-year period of worldwide distress so terrifying and threatening 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.

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.

It was Britain’s chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, who

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).

Eric Hobsbawm shows in another book, *The Age of*



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 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*.



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 techno-scientific 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 what theologian James Moffatt called “the Crisis at the Close”—the great-granddaddy of all crises culminating in the second coming of Jesus Christ (Daniel 12:9, Moffatt Translation).

Three Eras in Man's History

The Bible speaks of three specific ages in man's history. The first is the period before the Flood, from the time of Adam to Noah. It is called in the Bible "the world that then existed." We read in 2 Peter 3:6 that "the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water."

The second age includes the time after the Flood until Christ's second coming. It is called in Scripture "*this present evil age*" (Galatians 1:4). Jesus' disciples wanted to know when this period would end. They asked Him: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

The third age of man will begin at Christ's second coming and is referred to in God's Word as "*the world to come*" (Hebrews 2:5). The third era will start with the resurrection of the righteous at Jesus' return to earth.

Speaking of this resurrection, the book of Revelation states: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

So, strictly speaking, the end time refers to a specific period just before Christ returns that will bring "this present evil age" to a close. It is the end of the age of Satan's dominance over humanity.

Prophecies from the Old Testament

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 3½-year time of the end 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 [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 Christ 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 our present evil 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 God would one day establish His Kingdom. They lived and died confident 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 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).

(Other mentions of end-time events are in Psalm

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?

Jesus Christ contrasted “this age” with “the age to



come” (Matthew 12:32). The word translated “age” 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”).

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: “*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 immense 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



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.

Christianity: Just as “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light,” so do his representatives masquerade as “ministers of righteousness” and “apostles of 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 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.

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.

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 your copies of *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. These booklets are available free from our office nearest you or from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org. They will help you better understand the unimaginably better world God has in store beyond our age.

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. The period of upheaval and transition from man’s rule to God’s rule 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—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem” (Isaiah 4:2-3).

“For unto us a Child [Jesus Christ] is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

“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” (Isaiah 11:1-4).

“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



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.”

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

The final section of the Old Testament is known as the Minor Prophets. Virtually all of these 12 prophetic books 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 prophet Zechariah describes how Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives (background, above), which overlooks Jerusalem (foreground) on the city's east side.

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 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 to enjoy a spectacular view of the city and the gleaming temple overlaid with white marble and gold. “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. “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. And *unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved*; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:21-22).

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

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 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. His comprehension of time is not like ours. A day with Him is like 1,000 years and 1,000 years as one day (2 Peter 3:8).

John did warn us to be on the lookout for “antichrists,” a description meaning 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.

Paul, Peter, John and Jude use the terms *last days*, *last time* and *last times* to describe the last 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).

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.”

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, KJV).

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 expression “latter days” (Daniel 10:14) can include the “time of the end” (Daniel 11:35), a period immediately preceding and including the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21). It is the context of these words and phrases that weighs most heavily on the meaning they convey.

with the development and deployment of nuclear weapons 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 one deceives you. For many will come *in My name*, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5).

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 really follows Christ would be faithfully obeying God’s Word and His commandments. Christ 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 Jesus 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).

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” (Logos [software for Windows], 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. 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 predicted 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



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.

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” (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

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

Jesus Christ, in the Olivet Prophecy (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), predicted several major trends that would increase and intensify before His return. The trends He emphasized most were religious deception, wars, famines, disease epidemics and earthquakes.

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 said. "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' 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 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).

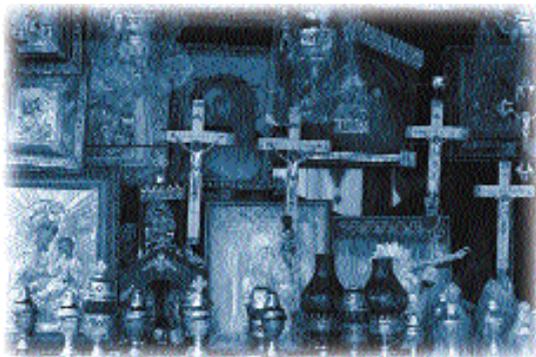
Are any of these predicted signs being fulfilled today?

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

Other apostles also warned of a great religious



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

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 Christ even while they hold to a bewildering variety of contradicting beliefs and practices. Is this the Christianity of the Bible, or is it part of the religious deception and confusion Christ predicted? (For further information, be sure to request 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 eight 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 around the world at any given time in the 1990s.

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

What will the next great war bring? According to Jesus Christ's revelation to John (Revelation 6:8; 9:13-18), well over *one billion* people will be slaughtered. With terrifying arsenals of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, such staggering casualties are 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; humans have been shown to be perfectly capable of producing their own famines through ill-founded policies and practices. Famine is also a natural consequence of disrupted economies, transportation and normal agricultural cycles during times of war.

At the time of this printing, the threat of widespread famine appears to have temporarily faded into the background. But it's likely only a matter of time before a surging world population produces another round of drastic food shortages. In this century alone the world popula-

tion has quadrupled to more than six 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 citizens. With so many new mouths to feed, starvation—and accompanying social disruption—will inevitably spread.

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

We have lost sight of the fact that God controls the weather. 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 patterns—and resulting famines—are a tool God will use to get the attention of an increasingly rebellious humanity.

Disease epidemics

Medical researchers are shocked by a recent development: the sudden emergence of baffling new diseases and epidemics. AIDS has garnered the most headlines—and rightfully so, since in sheer numbers it has claimed more lives than the black plague 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 are another chilling 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 periodically rock the earth.

Earthquake zones include some of the most densely



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

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 unnoticed 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.

Currently literally thousands of earthquakes take place daily, although most are so minor they are detected only by instruments. However, there are almost 1,000 moderate to strong earthquakes (5.0 to 6.9 on the Richter scale) 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. Whether earthquakes are increasing in strength or frequency or not, Jesus Christ’s prediction of “earthquakes in various places” certainly describes the 20th century.

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, 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.

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 be. And unless those day 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



Jerusalem will be a focal point of world events in the time leading up to Christ's return and the end of this age.

the Romans, Arabs and Turks. Jesus predicted foreign forces will again gain control in a period of unparalleled global crisis. This same period will see the instigation of a world war that, if God were not to intervene, 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 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 predicts 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 this century has seen 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 license to stern morality and back again. Such happened in the apostle Paul's day, in the Roman Empire, in Islam, 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 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.

The End Time in the Book of Revelation

In the Gospel accounts Jesus gave a brief summary of the events that would lead to His return. But later He filled in many details. Some 60 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



“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.

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 coming of Jesus Christ to establish God’s Kingdom on earth.

John explains where he was when he received a 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 man’s affairs when He establishes His Kingdom. (Plainly in this context it does not refer to a particular day of the week for worshiping God. To better understand which day God has set aside for rest and worship, please request our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God’s Sabbath Rest*.)

Paul 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 Christ, the Lord, is the central focus of these events. This is why the 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, as we will see, 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 the end-time events. When God the Father determines the time is ready, He authorizes Jesus to initiate the events written on the scroll. 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 Christ is being authorized to unleash the final events and then establish His Kingdom on earth.

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 reached the staggering mark of six 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 one billion to two billion population. Yet it took only 33 years to reach the three billion mark and 14 years to arrive at the four billion level. Next it took only 13 years to reach five billion, and now, just 11 years later, we have crossed the six billion mark.

From now on, it is estimated, one 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, or a billion, 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.

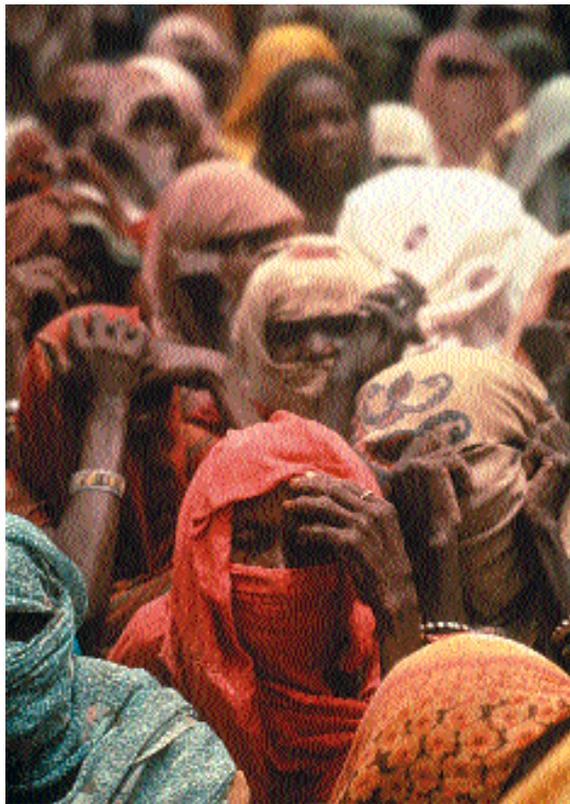
The population explosion is not only a problem of quantity, but of quality—because of varying living standards. While the birth rate in industrialized countries has plummeted, in backward regions it remains quite high.

It is estimated that more than 95 percent of population growth will take place in world's 130 poorest countries. Already one fourth of the earth's inhabitants live on less than a dollar a day. Yet this is part of the group that is dramatically multiplying.

Half of the world's population is concentrated in China (1.2 billion), India (one billion) and Africa (800 million).

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 1990 UN statistics, Tokyo was the most populous city, with 25 million, followed by New York City's 16 million. But the UN calculates that in the next 15 years the largest cities will be in poor nations, such as Bombay, India, with 28 million; Lagos, Nigeria, with 24 million; Shanghai, China, with 23 million; and Mexico City and São Paulo, with 20 million. Can these impoverished nations continue to provide basic services and enforce the peace as their resources dry up?



"And there will be famines . . ." said Jesus Christ when He described trends leading up to His return. Here malnourished Ethiopians gather for food in a refugee camp.

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 of Asia to field 200 million able-bodied soldiers. Until the latter part of the 20th century, Chinese and other Asian people 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



The world's exploding population is leading to the fulfillment of specific Bible prophecies. Some widespread practices destroy arable land (left), leading to growing desertification (above) and increased risk of prophesied famine as arable land shrinks. A chilling prophecy in the book of Revelation describes a massive military force 200 million strong—a number unimaginably huge until recent years.

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.



Parallel to Noah's day

The prediction of a rapid increase in population is related to the conditions in Noah's time. Christ compared the society of Noah's day to the end time: "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).

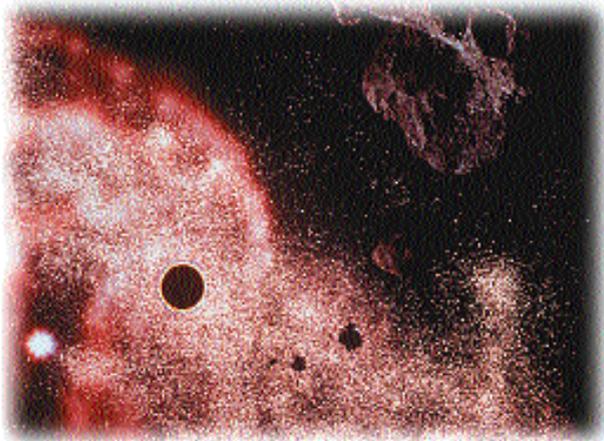
The people of Noah's day were not aware that God's judgment was being carried out because of an increase in their evil deeds. The Bible says the earth was full of violence and corruption, which was the reason God brought about the Flood (Genesis 6:5-12).

The New American Bible puts it this way: "In the eyes of God the earth was corrupt and full of lawlessness. When God saw how corrupt the earth had become, since all mor-

tals led depraved lives on earth, he said to Noah: 'I have decided to put an end to all mortals on earth; the earth is full of lawlessness because of them. So I will destroy them and all life on earth' " (Genesis 6:11-12).

Christ's prediction that end-time conditions would be similar to those of Noah's time does resemble the description of our day, although we don't know exactly how long God in His patience will permit time to go on before He intervenes. He prophesied He will eventually punish the earth's inhabitants for their evil, rebellious ways and establish His eternal Kingdom of peace. Peter reminds us, "God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built" (1 Peter 3:20, New International Version).

The population explosion is a fact of life. But little have people realized that these circumstances are leading to the fulfillment of end-time prophecies—ultimately bringing the solutions to a troubled world that only God in His mercy can provide.



Christ opens the seven seals

John describes 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 the 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 will also be greatly intensified in the suffering mankind will have to endure at the time of 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 only "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 theirs 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." This will be 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.

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.

Frightening 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.

"I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a 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 the 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 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, near the end 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.

As Christ finished the Olivet Prophecy, 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" (Luke 21:34-36).

'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? Two biblical reasons eliminate this possibility.

The first one is the 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, 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.

Second, Jesus continually told His disciples that only God the Father knew exactly when the end time would begin. He said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). If Jesus knew the end time would be in their generation, He would have

been contradicting Himself. He said even He didn't know the precise time. What He did know was the end-time events would all occur within the lifetime of one generation.

Even after Jesus was resurrected and appeared to His disciples, they asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus responded, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:6-7).

Jesus' disciples did not witness the time of the end. That was not the time God had established for it to occur. 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 usher out "this present evil age" and usher in the Kingdom of God. But many will perish before those horrible days come to a close.

What, then, did Christ mean when He said "this generation will not pass away"? He was merely explaining that, once all the prophesied world conditions are present, they will not continue indefinitely. World conditions will be so threatening that they *cannot* continue indefinitely or we would be in danger of extinction.

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.

God's Framework for End-Time Prophecy

What is the proper view of 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, but others are beyond our view 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, some major prophetic scenarios can be identified and specifically confirmed 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 erased. 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 his disposal, man 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. Man has never been a great caretaker of the earth, but never before did he have the capacity to destroy all human life. But Christ predicted that, left unchecked, mankind would do exactly that—and this is one of the reasons He must intervene to save mankind.

Second condition: the Jewish nation reborn

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

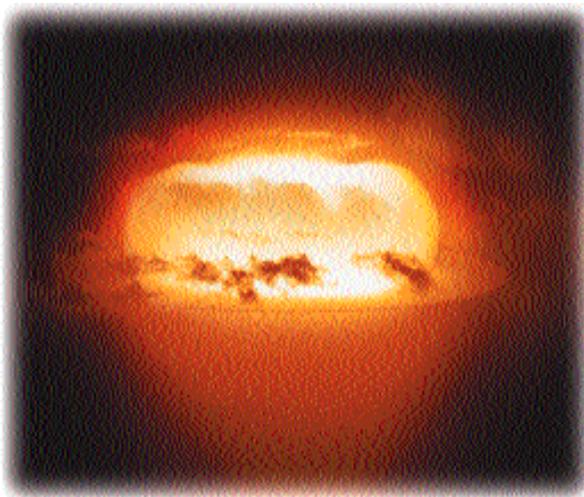
The survival of the religion and culture of this ancient biblical people, which witnessed the rise and decline of such great civilizations as Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, goes against the odds. The fact it was never assimilated into the nations where it was scattered is unprecedented. A historian of the 19th century, Heinrich Graetz, stated 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."

Historian Randall Price relates an anecdote about Napoleon. The French emperor was passing near a synagogue and heard weeping inside. He asked, "What is this crying?" He

was told it was weeping over the destruction of the 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 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



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.

'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 like an impossibility. The Jews had been scattered for close to 2,000 years, and the Arabs were firmly entrenched in the land. Jews did not have the military power, unity or backing of most of the world to come to Palestine. 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 began in 1948, it appeared its inhabitants would never control Jerusalem, and the populous Arab nations that surrounded her pledged they would never allow it. Yet in 1967, in the so-called Six-Day War, the state of Israel took possession of Jerusalem. But control of the Temple Mount, the platform on which the temple had stood, was given to the Arabs.

Since the Arabs 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 the temple on the Temple Mount to no avail. Police and Arab authorities have prohibited their entrance, 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 power in the world

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

The prophet Daniel, interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream of 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 components of this

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

Then, says Daniel, "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).

Some question whether the current moves to unify European countries are related to this prophesied power. It is interesting to let history reveal the roots of the movement. Michael Elliot of *Newsweek* 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'" (Jan. 29, 1996, p. 40).

At least the idea of beginning 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 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. However, whether they occur in this way or not, the Bible remains the inspired Word of God. The prophecies of the Bible *will* come to pass regardless of whether we understand them. In the meantime we should heed Jesus Christ's warning, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44).

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 grievous state of the world to which He would return, Jesus told His disciples, “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. 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).

In his account Luke emphasizes our personal conduct, that Christ warns us to be diligent in keeping our personal spiritual house in order and shows 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 be 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 asked his readers: “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 importance of personal preparedness for Christ’s coming and having an alert anticipation of that event.

Protection for God’s servants

One of the most encouraging aspects of this subject is knowing God has promised to watch over and care for His people during this time of unprecedented worldwide trouble. Jesus said there is nothing wrong with wanting to avoid suffering the end-time disasters. In fact, 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 and Lot’s day, God has promised a way for many of the faithful to be protected during those 3½ years. Peter explained that “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9, NASB).

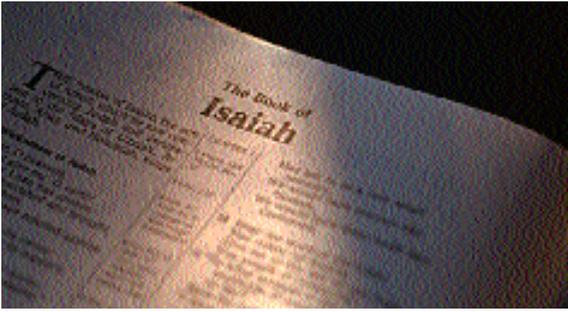
Although Satan in his anger will try to destroy God’s people, God will provide the means for many of them to be spared this dangerous time (Revelation 12:13-17). Jesus promised to care for those who faithfully serve Him during that time. “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep 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



Most people will be taken by surprise by the earth-shattering events that will mark the time of the end. You need not be caught unprepared.

from the coming global upheavals. “Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the



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

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" (Revelation 12:17), those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12), and "those who do His commandments" (Revelation 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, please 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 predicted part of His church at the end would not be spiritually ready for His coming. In Matthew 25 His parable of the 10 virgins shows that some of His people would neglect their spiritual state and be unprepared when He, the bridegroom, comes for His bride, the Church.

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 to God's Kingdom.

Paul gives a wonderful perspective of how we should spiritually prepare for that time, whether it takes place in our lifetime or not.

"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. It will inexorably lead to God's incomparable Kingdom.

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 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 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. Write for our other booklets on prophecy to better understand what God reveals about the future 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 analyzes world news 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 request our free Bible Study Course. Its monthly lessons will take you through the major themes and teachings of the Bible.

Most important, "seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near," God tells us. "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" (Isaiah 55:6-7).



