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### Divine Judgments Warn of the End

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# DIVINE JUDGMENTS WARN OF THE END

**Wars and disasters call us  
to repentance in preparation for the Advent.**

Last week we dealt with the proclamation of the gospel and growing apostasy as signs of Christ's coming. The third group of end-time signs given by Christ in His Olivet discourse may be called signs of divine judgment.

Jesus said, "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs" (Matt. 24:6-8).<sup>\*</sup> Luke adds "pestilences" to the listing of calamities (Luke 21:11). Before giving specific attention to the fulfillment of these signs in our time, let us briefly define the overall biblical significance of calamities.

**A call to repentance.** The Scriptures view calamities such as war, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences as manifestations of divine judgment upon human wickedness (Isa. 13-27; 63:1-6; Jer. 29:17-23; Rev. 16). Their purpose is, first of all, to summon people to repent (Joel 1:5, 14). Jesus explained that tragedies, such as the collapse of Siloam's tower that killed 18, were permitted in order to bring home the lesson that "unless you

repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

Disasters have a sobering effect; they cause many people to turn to God either in cursing or prayer. A high school in Palm Springs, California, reportedly posted a sign that read: "In the event of an earthquake, the Supreme Court's ruling against prayers in school will be temporarily suspended."

An earthquake caused the jailer at Philippi to exclaim, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). A famine sent King Ahab searching for the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:10). A plague brought Pharaoh to his knees, confessing, "I have sinned against the Lord" (Ex. 10:16). By calamities God summons mankind to repent before it is too late.

**Announcing the final judgment.** A second function of calamities is to serve as harbingers of the final judgment. Jesus spoke of wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences as "but the beginning of the birth-pangs" (Matt. 24:8). This presupposes more and worse disasters yet to come. These will cause such a "great tribulation" that "if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved" (verses 21, 22).

**Intensification of warfare.** The first

sign of divine judgment given by Christ is the occurrence of wars: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . . : all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs" (verses 6-8).

Daniel foresaw a succession of kingdoms in which warfare increased in intensity and extent (Dan. 2, 7). John portrayed the intensification of strife in the vision of the four horsemen (Rev. 6:1-8). Under the sixth plague "demonic spirits . . . go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty" (Rev. 16:14).

**Twentieth-century wars.** Wars have plagued mankind throughout history, but never before have they been so *global* and so *destructive*.

World War I, which engaged almost 30 nations, took the lives of nearly 9 million military personnel and 5 million civilians. Hardly 20 years passed before World War II, which involved more than 50 countries and killed more than 55 million civilians and military personnel, broke out. These two world wars caused more casualties and suffering than all previous wars combined.

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BY SAMUELE BACCHIOCCHI

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Since the end of World War II we have had about 140 conflicts, in which more than 10 million people have been killed. The race to improve the destructiveness of nuclear weapons goes on unabated. Analysts predict that the greatest threat of a nuclear war could come not from a direct clash between the superpowers, but from smaller developing countries operating nuclear reactors.

Increasing social and political tensions, coupled with the unchecked arms race, could easily drag mankind into another unwanted worldwide conflict that could become the apocalyptic battle of Armageddon or at least the prelude to it.

### Natural and Man-Made Disasters

Together with wars, Jesus mentioned disasters as signs of the end: "There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences" (Luke 21:11). Jesus spoke of these as being "but the beginning of the birth-pangs" (Matt. 24:8), thus implying that they will intensify and cause the "great tribulation" that will be shortened by Christ's return (verses 21, 22).

**Natural disasters today.** While disasters have often occurred in the course of history, they appear to have increased in recent years. *Science News*, for example, notes "a worldwide trend in increased temblors." Australian seismologist G. A. Eiby, in his recent book *Earthquakes*, reports 206 earthquakes with magnitude of 8.0 or more (like 1906, San Francisco) for the period 1903 to 1976, and 131 earthquakes for the period 1500 to 1902.

"Blizzards hitting much of the United States and Europe in the most severe winter of the century . . . Earthquakes rocking New England and Arkansas . . . Mountains rumbling the Northwest . . . Sinkholes swallowing buildings in Florida. Such cataclysms of earth and weather, coming one on top of another, are raising the question of whether Mother Nature has gone berserk."

**Man-made disasters.** The Club of Rome, a distinguished watchdog organization, says, "Suddenly—vir-

tually overnight when measured on a historical scale—mankind finds itself confronted by a multitude of unprecedented crises: The population crisis, the environmental crisis, the world food crisis, the energy crisis, the raw material crisis, to name a few."

**Famines today.** Famines have occurred often in the past, but never before has mankind had 1 billion persons suffering from starvation or malnutrition. A million-dollar study, commissioned by President Carter in 1980 and published under the title "Global 2000 Report to the President," predicts that by the end of this century the number of starving people will more than double.

## Disasters cause people to turn to God in cursing or in prayer.

A major factor in the unprecedented hunger crisis is the population explosion of this past century. It took until 1830 for world population to reach the first billion, then only 100 years (1930) to reach the second billion, 30 years (1960) to reach the third billion, and 15 years (1975) to reach the fourth billion. Experts estimate that by the year 2000 world population will have climbed to about 7 billion. Much of this growth will occur in developing countries where a food crisis already exists.

The starvation of a few individuals makes a sad statistic, but the starvation of hundreds of millions presents an unprecedented world tragedy and a clear sign that the return of Christ is both certain and imminent.

**Epidemic diseases.** Causally inter-

related to famines is the Advent sign of "pestilences" (Luke 21:11), that is, infectious or contagious diseases that reach epidemic proportions. Despite the medical triumphs of our time such as the discovery of antibiotics and vaccines, pestilences not only persist but have reached epidemic proportions in many parts of the world.

Most Westerners ignore the frightening prevalence and devastation caused by tropical diseases in developing countries. According to the United Nations, intestinal roundworm victimizes 650 million people. Hookworm afflicts 450 million. Dysentery victimizes 350 million people and kills at least 6 million children annually. In addition to these diseases, which in some developing countries affect 80 to 90 percent of the population, the six killers—measles, tuberculosis, whooping cough, polio, tetanus, and diphtheria—kill 5 million children a year and disable another 5 million.

In industrialized nations the two leading killers are cardiovascular disorders and cancer. Approximately 5 million people die annually from cancer and twice as many from cardiovascular diseases. Many countries are currently experiencing epidemics of herpes, gonorrhea, and AIDS, a deadly scourge that is doubling the number of its victims every year.

### Conclusion

The end-time signs given by Christ in His Olivet discourse and clarified by other New Testament writers are finding an unprecedented fulfillment in our times. The unique fulfillment today of all the Advent signs given by Christ tells us that God is calling upon unbelievers to repent and upon believers to live holy and godly lives while announcing the good news of a soon-coming Saviour. □

\*Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

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