

The Rapture and the Last Days

"Are We Living in the Last Days?"

Discussion

These past few months, I've gotten the same question from a variety of people: "Are we living in the last days?" Their question is normally filled with anxiety that perhaps the "end" is coming, and that it will be here within the foreseeable future. Perhaps you've been wondering this as well; and if so, it comes as no surprise.

A quick review of the events that have occurred over just the past twelve months provides an indication of why this question is becoming more prevalent. Earthquakes here in the U.S. as well as overseas in places like China that killed thousands upon thousands; animals and children dying from poisoned or contaminated food; extreme shortages in food supplies impacting the poor and hungry in dramatic ways all around the world; the sky rocketing cost of a barrel of oil as well as the dramatic increase in prices for other commodities such as gold, silver, and necessities such as corn, rice, and potash – a critical fertilizer for growing food.

Add to the above, the collapse of the housing bubble, millions of displaced families now bankrupt and out of work – and on an international scale never seen before. Then add global warming fears, global melting, and global freezing – the next ice age is just around the corner, large fish kills – fish suddenly dying for either unexplained reasons, polluted waters, and oil spills. There seem to be extremes in weather around the globe: killer cyclones and hurricanes, flooding and drought, polar ice melting and record snow falls.

Plus, wars of all magnitudes are being waged literally around the globe: dictators imagining the most wicked of schemes, genocide and attempted genocide of entire ethnic groups, terrorism, guerilla warfare and anarchy in several locations around the world; Russia and Georgia at war, unrest in Pakistan, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Colombia, Venezuela and other South American countries, plus Israel and Palestine; many of these involving the threat of nuclear weapons – all capped by a global recession that some are beginning to compare to the Great Depression.

A weak dollar and other weak currencies around the world, a global economic slowdown – productivity dropping; and, this past week, the continued collapse of the country's banking and financial institutions and markets. Internationally, governments are taking over huge pieces of the capital structure and economic systems of the global economy – "Babylon has fallen".

So, are we living in the last days?

Let me answer this by saying that, if you believe that the events enumerated above indicate that we are living in the last days, then you are looking at the wrong signs of Christ's second coming. Consider what he told the Pharisees – you can see the signs in the sky that tell you what the weather will be tomorrow, but you cannot see the signs of the coming of the Son of Man. They were looking at the wrong things.

While our upside-down and often chaotic world today seems hopeless – and it is, without Christ – we can take just a few slices of time in history to see that the same picture of anxiety existed before. For example, I am sure many thought that the Second World War was such a time and that Hitler was the Anti-Christ. Other examples include the Dust Bowl days, or the Great Depression, or the Black Plague, or Roman rule, or even the Crusades – these would all have looked as if the "last days" were upon us.

Christ himself warns us that earthquakes and wars and false Christs will all appear, but he also tells us "these things must happen, but the end is still to come". He warns us not to be fooled by

the fake signs and the false Christs who will be everywhere. Natural disasters, wars, famines, heretics and lunatics should not fool us into thinking that Christ's return is imminent based solely on these signs. If we do, we'll be fooled into following after a false Christ.

However, we are to watch faithfully for His coming again, and the Bible provides us with clear signs of His second coming. If we closely examine God's word, we'll see there will be two distinct signs indicating that Christ's return is drawing very close: (1) the creation of a peace treaty between Israel and the "Beast", and (2) the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Of particular note is the fact that, at the signing of this treaty, the nation of Israel will feel so secure that it will drop many of its national defenses – trusting fully in this new relationship instead of God. Additionally, Israel will return to the practice of sacrificial worship in a new Temple.

Between now and then, God's Word is not clear on the activities and events that will take place – only He knows the day and time. Clearly governments will rise and fall, and the global economy will grow and expand – as the world positions itself for the rise of the Beast and the False Prophet. Keep in mind that, however, that these events may take generations or even thousands of years – we cannot know. But we do know that when Christ does return, the world will not be watching for Him. In fact, they will be asking the believers of the day: "Where is this Christ?" Do you think that these kinds of things have happened, or are happening, today? I don't believe that they are, since the world still looks for a savior; but it clearly seeks to become less and less dependent on a saviour and more and more dependent on its own intelligence and strength. What then can we say about today?

Knowing that each day that passes brings us closer to Christ's Coming, we need to ask ourselves what God's Word tells us about that time – and our responsibility today as we prepare for it. In summary, it commands us to be good stewards over the resources and opportunities that He provides us each day, for we know not when the master will return....and when He does return, we are to be found faithfully doing what he sent us here to do.

Don't be misled, focusing on the pre-tribulation rapture, wondering when God will yank us all out of here, wondering if it will be tomorrow, or the next day because "the end is near". God can easily protect His church during any period of severe judgment without removing them from the world; just as he protected Noah and his family when He judged the world with a flood, just as He protected the children of Israel when He punished Egypt with the plagues and swallowed up their army in the Red Sea, or just as He protected Rahab and her family even while the walls of Jericho were tumbling down around them.

Don't focus on what might be coming next; focus on the task at hand...finding, feeding, nurturing and discipling the lost who need Christ today more than ever. See the events and anxieties of today as opportunities to lead the lost to Christ, and not as a time for handwringing about "the last days". Consider when Christ returns how marvelous it will be; consider preparing to live and reign with Him for a thousand years – and if you don't think he'll literally reign for a thousand years, then consider when He comes again how awesome it will be living in our father's house forever!

Until then – find His lost sheep. and let the Shepherd take care of the rest.

In Christ,

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