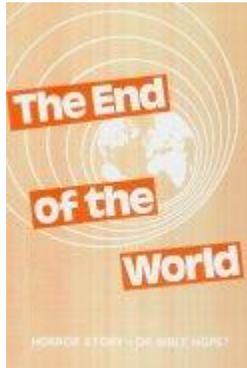


The End of the World Horror Story - or Bible Hope?



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AS the sun began to rise, the truth became frighteningly clear: nothing was left. There was no-one to be seen; every living thing had been destroyed, wiped off the face of the earth.

Survivors

Yet, incredibly, there were a few survivors; just one family sealed up in their home-made shelter, with enough provisions to last for over a year. They had listened to the warnings and had prepared, so that when the time came, in they went with their livestock and their survival kit.

Their minds were still full of the experience they had gone through. To begin with there had been horror; sounds outside of terror and despair, upheaval and chaos, but the family had sat tight, holding hands, safely enclosed. Later came silence and that was even worse. What now? Was it safe to open the window? What would they find? They knew with certainty that the earth outside, would be strange; a very different place from the familiar world they had left behind. Their home had gone for sure and all the landmarks. There would be emptiness and devastation. Would they be able to survive?

Science Fiction?

Perhaps, you are thinking, this is just science fiction. The chances are it will never happen. The fact is, it actually did happen to real people. It's a true account of a family who survived when their world came to an end.

They knew nothing about nuclear war or radiation: the danger which surrounded them was caused by billions of tons of water - tidal waves and torrents which submerged the earth. Nevertheless they are of especial interest to us, for we too are faced with the possibility of world-wide disaster, a fiery holocaust instead of a flood and the fear that our world like theirs could come to an end.

Noah's Time - Just like ours!

You can read a full account of Noah and the flood in the Bible - in Genesis (chapters 6-8). Although

Noah and his family lived 5,000 years ago, their world was not all that different from ours. The history books may tell us that back in those days men were primitive and just emerging from the stone-age, but don't you believe it! The Bible tells us that in fact they were very civilised, living in cities, enjoying themselves, getting rich, eating and drinking well, permissive in their behaviour, totally lacking in morals. There was violence and crime, cruelty and oppression and, just like nowadays, the earth had become a dangerous place.

Noah and his family were sickened with the misery and violence they saw: they wanted a better world where there would be kindness and peace. The main difference between them and the rest of the population was that they believed in God the Creator and they knew He cared about the earth and mankind.

God spoke to Noah and told him He was also grieved and angry because His earth was being spoiled and He intended to clean it up. In fact, God said He would literally wash it and wipe off all traces of the people who had filled the earth with wickedness.

God gave Noah clear instructions how he and his family could survive and when Noah, his wife, his sons and their wives went into the ark they had built, it was God Himself who sealed them in. The family lived in the ark for over a year until the flood water had drained away and God, who had brought them through that terrible ordeal, encouraged them to go out into the earth and start a new life.

Rainbow Promise

The old world had certainly come to an end; there was no sign of any civilisation or of any of the things men had made, but the earth itself was safe and habitable, ready and waiting for Noah to plant seed and produce crops. God still had a purpose with planet earth. In fact God immediately gave Noah a solemn promise:

"Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Genesis 8:21,22).

As a guarantee God gave a sign - the rainbow which appears in the sky after rain (Genesis 9:14-16).

This promise was given even though God knew Noah's descendants (from whom sprang all the races and nations on earth) would be no better than the people who lived before the flood, because, to quote God's words again: "Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood". This means every single one of us has inherited from the first human parents (Adam and Eve) a selfish core which makes it easier to hate than to love and which leads to destruction and death. Left to ourselves we are powerless to change this sinful nature and have no hope of saving the world.

God had proved to Noah he was able to save him but Noah and his family eventually died. Suffering and death still continued on the earth. so what was the point of being saved? What comfort was it to Noah to be promised that the earth would endure if he wasn't alive to enjoy it?

We have to turn to the New Testament to discover what motivated Noah. We are told he had faith that God would reward him in the future even though he died, and he would be the "heir of righteousness" (Hebrews 11:7). Noah died in faith, knowing he would again live on the earth when it was made wholly

clean, when he and all those like him would no longer be sinful, dying creatures, but would be changed to righteous, immortal beings; when the world men had made would end and the world God had designed would begin.

A New World

Although after the flood the earth seemed to continue in just the same way as it had from the beginning, God had already begun to create His world. He had no intention of allowing the earth to be filled with suffering and death for ever. Here are some of God's intentions in His own words in the Bible:

"This is what the Lord says: He who created the heavens, He is God; He who fashioned and made the earth, He founded it; He did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited . . . There is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Saviour . . . Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth . . . Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength' " (Isaiah 45:18-24).

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

God first revealed His plan to a man called Abraham, who was born in the Middle East about 1,000 years after Noah. Abraham believed in God and he was told that through his descendants, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Like Noah, Abraham also knew the promise was an everlasting one, reaching into the future when God's world came into its own on the earth; he knew he would be "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13).

Abraham - Ancestor of Jesus Christ

God promised to give Abraham and his descendants a country, and from Abraham came a nation of people, the Jews. When the Jews settled in the land of Israel they became a Kingdom - in fact God's Kingdom on earth - to be an example of righteousness and peace for all nations. Their capital city, chosen by God, was Jerusalem, where the temple, God's House, was built to His honour and glory. But the Jews as a nation were unable to save the world, even though they were shown signs and wonders and given help and instruction from God. Some of the Jews believed and obeyed but the majority preferred to go their own evil way.

The Jewish world was far from being the Kingdom of God until God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, born a Jew and a descendant of Abraham through Mary his mother, to save His people from sin and death and to rule over the Kingdom.

The birth of Jesus was a miracle and his life was in every way unique. He showed people how they should live; how they should learn to care for others instead of only themselves and replace the hate in their hearts with love. Jesus made it clear the Jewish world of that time would have to end. The Jewish leaders were hypocrites, outwardly pretending to be godly and righteous but inwardly full of wickedness. The temple had become "a den of thieves" instead of a "house of prayer" (Matthew 21:13) and it would be destroyed, together with the city of Jerusalem, and the Jewish people would be enslaved and scattered throughout the earth.

"Thy will be done on earth"

To those who believed and followed, Jesus gave a message of hope and good news about the Kingdom of God. He taught them to pray for the Kingdom to come and God's will to be done "on earth as in

heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Jesus assured his followers that God so loved the world that He had sent His only Son as the Saviour, that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16); that he was "the resurrection and the life" and would raise the dead (John 5:25-29).

Jesus told his disciples he would come "in the clouds with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30); his throne would be in Jerusalem; he would rule over the nations and his faithful followers would inherit that Kingdom, ruling with him over the whole earth (Matthew 25:31-34).

The Jewish leaders refused to believe Jesus Christ was the Son of God, their Saviour and King, and they plotted to destroy him. So Jesus was crucified and died (Matthew 27). This was the price God paid to save His world! His only Son, whom He loved, who showed people what God was like, the Saviour, the One born to be the King, was put to death by wicked men.

Worlds in Conflict

God's plan had reached a crisis. Here were the two worlds in conflict, brought face to face. On the one hand, God's world, represented by His Son, the righteous King who demonstrated understanding and forgiveness and was caring and kind - even though, having done nothing wrong, he experienced the full force of human wickedness. On the other hand, the world made by men, motivated by hatred, whose power was based on oppression, greed, violence and destruction.

In Jesus Christ, God offered the solution to the curse of sin and death. He showed that death was no problem to Him, for He could bring back the dead to life. His Son who had never sinned rose from the dead on the third day after he had died on the cross, now to be alive for evermore. He appeared to his followers and turned their bewilderment into excitement, their grief into joy (John 20; Luke 24:36-48). Jesus told them the time had not yet come for God's Kingdom to be set up on earth. He had to go to heaven to His Father, but all power had been given to him in heaven and in earth. They were to go to all nations, preaching the Gospel (God's good news), teaching them to keep his commands and baptizing them in his name for the forgiveness of their sins. And Jesus promised, "Surely I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus' disciples knew that "the end of the world" would come when Jesus returned to set up the Kingdom of God; at that time he would raise the dead who had been faithful to his Father and to him; they would be given eternal life and would rule with him over the earth.

When Jesus had spoken about his return he made it clear that it would coincide with a time of great trouble on the earth - and he particularly mentioned Noah. He said:

"In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:38,39).

Just like the Days of Noah!

From heaven Jesus sent messages to his apostles. He said that as time passed many people would scoff and say, 'What about that promised coming kingdom? Everything goes on just as it always has since the beginning.' But such people deliberately forget that long ago the world was deluged in water and destroyed. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promises: He is patient, wanting everyone to repent, not to perish. A thousand years are nothing to God - they seem like a day.

But, just as the earth was once destroyed by water, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire. Bible language suggests that the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be burned (2 Peter 3:3-10; see also Acts 17:31 and 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Nuclear Holocaust?

So, when Jesus returns to set up the Kingdom of God, will our world be destroyed by fire? When Peter and Paul wrote those words the possibility of men being able to destroy the earth by fire would be way beyond their imagination. In our days it is a very real fear. It is no secret that there are enough nuclear weapons stockpiled literally to incinerate every living thing on the face of the earth and to leave it empty and waste.

Is this what the Bible foretells? Will there be a nuclear war?

Let's look at the other evidence in the Bible, remembering Jesus endorsed all that was said by the Old Testament prophets, who foretold that the centre of events at the time of the end would be Israel and especially the city of Jerusalem.

The prophecies made centuries ago are startling in their relevance to our present world. They speak about Israel and the Jewish people as a power to be reckoned with among the nations; of Jerusalem being a major cause of trouble and concern; nations such as Persia (Iran), Libya, Ethiopia and a great northern power, with massive armaments, becoming a threat to world peace and invading Israel.

Prophecies Come True

For instance: the prophet Ezekiel (chapters 38-39) foretells a terrible disaster in Israel in the "latter years" after the people of Israel have returned to their land from a long exile. A vast army will invade Israel from the north, but God will intervene:

"At that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel . . . all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence . . . Every man's sword will be against his brother" (38:19-21).

God will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulphur on them and they will fall on the mountains of Israel. The war will have a far-reaching effect because fire will also fall on those who are far-off and think they are safe (39:6).

Israel at the Centre of it all

Then, we are told, the people who live in the towns of Israel will go out and collect the weapons, which will be used for fuel for seven years (39:9,10). There will also have to be special burial parties, equipped to deal with the dead; every single bone will be gathered and carefully disposed of. The details are horrifyingly familiar to us in this nuclear age, who know the potential of nuclear power and the effects of radiation.

The prophet Joel also spoke about the Day of the Lord:

"I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, said God. Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (2:30,31).

Through Malachi, the last prophet in the Old Testament, God said:

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble and that day that is coming will set them on fire" (4:1).

But though these are human wars God is using them to work out His purpose.

"The Lord will go out and fight against those nations. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives on the eastern side of the city and there will be a great earthquake" (Zechariah 14:1-4).

The superpowers are already positioned around the trouble-spots of the Middle East. It is not difficult to imagine them being drawn together to a final battle in the land of Israel. That tiny state will be the centre of a violent Third World War.

There is no doubt that all these prophecies will come to pass in the very near future. But we, like Noah, can have confidence in God as long as we obey the clear instructions He has given in the Bible, knowing He will bring us through the turmoil and chaos and will preserve the earth according to His promise.

So will the earth be reduced to cinders? Will this lovely planet be destroyed? It is not the earth which is to be destroyed, but this civilisation; this materialistic society has to be purged with fire.

Gloom and Doom?

The gloom and doom are not for ever. All the prophecies end with reassurance and hope. Ezekiel declares that the result of the fiery destruction in Israel will be the beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth, for, says God,

"I will show my greatness and my holiness and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 38:23).

Joel says:

"Every one who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said" (2:32).

Malachi ends with comforting words from God:

"For you who revere my Name, the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in his wings" (4:2).

And Zechariah assures us that,

"The Lord will be king over the whole earth; on that day there will be one Lord and his name the only name" (14:9).

An End to World Empires

Our world will not welcome Jesus as King. Many who have achieved wealth and status in the world of men will oppose him, but we are told that all their kingdoms and "empires" will be utterly destroyed, burned by fire, ironically by their own hands! Those who lose their riches will mourn, when their space

projects, their mines and oil-rigs, their factories for armaments and chemicals, their status symbols and luxuries, their transport and banking systems - all go up in smoke! (See Revelation 17; 18; 19).

The Bible is God's guidebook for life. It gives clear advice - and dire warnings. Those who follow God's advice, as Noah did, will be saved from the terrible judgements God is bringing on the earth.

Those who believe and gladly accept Jesus, together with all the faithful men and women down the ages, raised from the dead, will say,

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever . . . We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:15-18).

A New Beginning

So the ending is really the beginning . . . a new beginning in which all of us can share.

As the sun began to rise it became apparent that nothing was left . . . Everything had been made new! The earth basked in glory, and sounds of joy and gladness rose to heaven (Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-5).

"God shalt wipe away all tears . . . there shall be no more death . . . neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:5).

-- SHEILA WILSON

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