

Signs of Hope

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Introduction

Then He told them a parable: “Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near”
(Luke 21:29-31).

Trim and physically fit at 70 years old, his hair and beard whitened by time, the man with a gentle face moved at a steady pace. He looked like a loving grandfather on his way to bring a present to his grandchildren. At least, that’s what anyone would think seeing him walk down the streets of the city in his dark suit, a leather briefcase in his right hand.

But the truth is different. The man didn’t have a present for anyone. His briefcase hid a bomb—that is, a “bomb” in the form of the news he was carrying. It was news that would shake public opinion around the world and stir up controversy. As the news spread, a lot of people thought the old fellow was crazy. Others believed that he was engaged in an exercise of self-promotion. At any rate, Ernie Chambers, independent state senator in Nebraska, was known as an old, argumentative, and irreverent politician.

On that morning of September 14, 2007, Senator Chambers went into the Douglas County courthouse and filed a lawsuit against God. He demanded that God stop causing so much terror in the world.

In the petition that he filed the African-American

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attorney who had never practiced law accused God of causing “fearsome floods, egregious earthquakes, horrendous hurricanes, terrifying tornadoes, pestilential plagues, ferocious famines, devastating droughts, genocidal wars, birth defects and the like.” He said the Deity was responsible for “calamitous catastrophes resulting in the widespread death, destruction, and terrorization of millions upon millions of the earth’s inhabitants, including innocent babes, infants, children, the aged and infirm, without mercy or distinction,”¹ and he asked the court for an injunction ordering God to cease and desist.

Strange or quixotic though it may appear, Chambers’ lawsuit against God shows at least two things: the irreverence of modern humanity, and, more significantly, the anxiety that millions of people feel today because of the terrifying events taking place all around them. Strange things are, indeed, happening to our planet.

At no previous time in recorded history have we seen so many natural disasters in such a short period of time. They have leveled entire cities and snuffed out thousands of lives. According to a report of the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change, if global warming continues at its present rate, it could eradicate a fourth of the species of plants and animals of the earth by the year 2050.²

We can no longer fail to be concerned about such news. Senator Chambers’ lawsuit may appear frivolous or absurd, but it is coherent in its concern.

The atmospheric phenomena threatening the safety of the planet are nothing less than terrifying. Is something beyond human control about to take place?

If not, how can we explain so many natural disasters, so much suffering and despair? How can we make sense of the scores of floods, earthquakes, fires, volcanoes, and hurricanes? How can we cope with the terror, desolation, and death that face us on every hand? And the existential confusion that people are experiencing? How do we explain so many people destroying lives and dreams without mercy? For example, how could human beings, supposedly the most intelligent of creatures, kidnap innocent children to humiliate them sexually and sell photos of them to the perverse world of pornography? What went on in the mind of a university student who opened fire indiscriminately, killing many of his classmates and afterward taking his own life? What would lead youth today to spend billions of dollars every year on drugs, supporting a vast criminal underworld? What is it that they are looking for so desperately and not finding? Why do they do such things, knowing that they are only destroying themselves? Something is wrong. The train of life has derailed and is hurtling out of control over a precipice.

This book takes a look at what is behind such events. All of the seemingly incoherent acts of humanity and nature do have a rational explanation. Nature out of control, human perversity, senseless wars, and famines and epidemics are only the visible part of what is happening in the world. Behind the curtain of these apparently unrelated facts, something is approaching. As yet invisible and silent, but inexorable. What the present world doesn't understand, a Book predicted centuries ago.

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Jesus said: “Learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and put forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door” (Matthew 24:32, 33).

What is it that is near? What was Jesus talking about when He spoke those words? The answer to these questions will change the course of history. And it will most definitely affect your personal struggles and the destiny of the people you love. This is the story of the climactic end of the millennial conflict. Read this book, and you will understand.

¹ www.ketv.com/news/14133442/detail.html. Douglas County District Court Judge Marlon Polk later threw the injunction out because the court did not have an address for God to send it.

² *Climate Change, 1995: The Science of Climate Change: Contribution of Working Group I to the Second Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

What Is the Sign of Your Coming?

*“As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives,
the disciples came to Him privately, saying,
‘Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be
the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’”
(Matthew 24:3).*

The supreme moment was approaching, the critical hour when the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Creator of the universe and owner of the heavens and the earth, would descend to the depths of humiliation. Nailed to a cross reserved for the worst criminal, He would pay the infinite price to ransom the human race. The price would be His own blood. But through that blood He would rescue humanity from the power of death.

A dense cloud of sorrow and suffering hung over the disciples like a messenger of doom. But they did not perceive it. Maybe they were too human to understand the things of the Spirit. The Master, however, was well aware of the solemnity of the hour. While in a short time anguish and loneliness would overwhelm them, He didn't want them to suffer. He loved them with an incomprehensible and infinite love. How could He make them understand so that they would be prepared for what was about to happen?

The Bible account says: “Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him” (Matthew

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24:1). “Teacher,” they said, “behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” (Mark 13:1). Even though the eternal destiny of humanity would be decided in a few hours, the disciples were concerned only about material things—the buildings of the Temple.

The human mind is fascinated by glitter—by the things it can perceive through its senses. The disciples could see the Temple. They could touch the polished blocks of limestone and admire its gold furnishings and mighty columns.

Twenty centuries have passed, and people are still fascinated by what they can perceive with their physical senses. The spiritual dimension of life, however, continues to be elusive. Once again, we are approaching a critical point in history. But the great climax of events that looms just ahead seems to be lost in the shadow of our humanity. The end of time is hovering over us, but like the disciples of old, we’re oblivious to it. All our attention is concentrated on the things we can view with our physical eyes—the wars, violence, earthquakes, hurricanes, global warming, social calamities, and injustice that surround us on every side. Those things fill our whole field of vision. But we are blind to their meaning. So we look for quick-fix human solutions to remove the dark shadows that cover the land.

On that occasion, Jesus’ answer to His disciples left them perplexed. “Do you not see all these things?” He asked. “Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down” (Matthew 24:2). The disciples heard their Master’s words and concluded that when He said that this fabulous building would someday lie in ruins He must