

Preparing for the End Times

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Delivered to Ohev Yisrael May 3, 2014

Almost everyone in the "civilized" world has heard that the Bible predicts the decline of society, wars, natural disasters, moral degradation, forces that come against God, and finally the end. These things are known even by those who do not study the Bible, and are known even more intimately by those who do. They are believed by some and not by others, and responded to differently by some than by others.

I have never been enamored of studying end-time prophecies because my view has always been that what will be, will be. God has determined what will happen and, since nothing I do will change it, there is no profit in my putting too much time and energy into studying it or thinking about it. Better, I have thought, to direct my efforts toward doing what God wants of me because I want to obey my Heavenly Father whom I love, rather than because of any consequences to the world or to me.

I have seen bad fruit come from believers who become wrapped up in trying to understand the end of times and make preparations for it. The least of it has been spending more time on the pursuit than is profitable and, at the extreme, it has engendered fear, and has caused believers to do things of which God would not approve – such things as quitting jobs, disposing of possessions, building survival bunkers, arming ourselves, and even preparing to blast off from the earth in rocket ships. Even more harmful than the bizarre, is becoming unbalanced in one's biblical attention and understanding, and, as a result, failing in matters that are more immediately important.

Most recently, my attention has turned, not to end-time prophecies per se, but to the difficulty that some of us are having in knowing how to deal with end-time events that are coming to pass even as I speak. I clearly remember my thoughts the first time I read the account of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible. "How incredible," I thought, "that those people could stoop to such low moral levels. It is no wonder that God destroyed them. It is inconceivable that such a thing could ever happen in the United States today." I was naive about what was already happening around me when I first read it but, as time went on, little by little, I saw Sodom and Gomorrah reconstruct before my eyes. And, as I studied Scripture, I gradually became aware of what the New Covenant Scriptures predicted about it.

In Hebrew, Sodom is *S'dom*, and Gomorrah is *Amorah*; and in the Complete Jewish Bible, we read these Scriptures:

Luke 17:22-32

"Then he said to his *talmidim*, "The time is coming when you will long to see even one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will say to you, 'Look! Right here!' or, 'See! Over there!' Don't run off, don't follow them, because the Son of Man in his day will be like lightning that flashes and lights up the sky from one horizon to the other. But first he must endure horrible suffering and be rejected by this generation. Also, at the time of the Son of

Man, it will be just as it was at the time of Noach. People ate and drank, and men and women married, right up until the day Noach entered the ark; then the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, as it was in the time of Lot- people ate and drank, bought and sold, planted and built; but the day Lot left S'dom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. That is how it will be on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, if someone is on the roof with his belongings in his house, he must not go down to take them away. Similarly, if someone is in the field, he must not turn back- remember Lot's wife!"

2 Peter 2:1-6

"But among the people there were also false prophets, just as there will be false teachers among you. Under false pretenses they will introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and thus bring on themselves swift destruction. Many will follow their debaucheries; and because of them, the true Way will be maligned. In their greed they will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their punishment, decreed long ago, is not idle; their destruction is not asleep! For God did not spare the angels who sinned; on the contrary, he put them in gloomy dungeons lower than Sh'ol to be held for judgment. And he did not spare the ancient world; on the contrary, he preserved Noach, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, and brought the Flood upon a world of ungodly people. And he condemned the cities of S'dom and 'Amora, reducing them to ashes and ruin, as a warning to those in the future who would live ungodly lives;"

And this Scripture, Romans 1:18-32, sums up the situation perfectly; it's long and I am tempted to shorten it as I read it to you, but I am convicted that God wants you to hear it in its entirety:

Romans 1:18-32

"What is revealed is God's anger from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who in their wickedness keep suppressing the truth; because what is known about God is plain to them, since God has made it plain to them. For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities- both his eternal power and his divine nature- have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse; because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened. Claiming to be wise, they have become fools! In fact, they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for mere images, like a mortal human being, or like birds, animals or reptiles! This is why God has given them up to the vileness of their hearts' lusts, to the shameful misuse of each other's bodies. They have exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, by worshipping and serving created things, rather than the Creator- praised be he forever. *Amen*. This is why God has given them up to degrading passions; so that their women exchange natural sexual relations for unnatural; and likewise the men, giving up natural relations with the opposite sex, burn with passion for one another, men committing shameful acts with other men and receiving in their own persons the penalty appropriate to their perversion. In other words, since they have not considered God worth knowing, God has given them up to worthless ways of thinking; so that they do improper things. They are filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and vice; stuffed with jealousy, murder, quarrelling, dishonesty and ill-will; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God; they are insolent, arrogant and boastful; they plan evil

schemes; they disobey their parents; they are brainless, faithless, heartless and ruthless. They know well enough God's righteous decree that people who do such things deserve to die; yet not only do they keep doing them, but they applaud others who do the same."

One would have to be brain-dead not to realize that we are not just seeing early signs of these prophecies coming to pass – we are knee-deep in the middle of them. Homosexuality becoming a normal lifestyle. Men marrying men and women marrying women. Atheism touted as a bona fide religion. And these are not just societal incursions. Society is actually turning on its head, where what used to be called wrong and was prohibited is now, not only allowed, it is preferred. Those who profess belief in God and God's moral teachings are ridiculed as being uninformed and even dangerous. Those who seek to build their family with the traditional roles are scorned for oppressing women. Spanking a child is now child abuse and, in some quarters saying "no" to him is seen as detrimental to his healthy growth. Machine-gunning thirty people on television or in a child's video game is the exercise of free expression, but a kindergartener posturing his fingers to look like a gun causes his suspension. Judeo-Christian beliefs contributed to the founding principles of this country but now, Christians are being discriminated against and sometimes even persecuted in these United States. And let's not forget to mention that killing unborn children for convenience is steadily gaining in acceptability.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 reads:

"Moreover, understand this: in the *acharit-hayamim* [the end of days] will come trying times. People will be self-loving, money-loving, proud, arrogant, insulting, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, uncontrolled, brutal, hateful of good, traitorous, headstrong, swollen with conceit, loving pleasure rather than God, as they retain the outer form of religion but deny its power."

And of course, we cannot help but notice the increase in natural disasters – earthquakes, tsunamis, forest fires, famines, tornados, floods. And the rise of false messiahs. When you think of modern-day false messiahs, don't look for those who proclaim themselves to be messengers of God, since most of the world will have strayed from God, and secularism will be the world's religion. Look for men of power and influence who eschew God, and claim that they will save us from one thing or another by their power, their personality, or their brilliance. All of these are also prophesied in the Bible:

Matthew 24:7-14, 23-24

"For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world; all this is but the beginning of the 'birth-pains.' At that time you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death, and all peoples will hate you because of me. At that time many will be trapped into betraying and hating each other, many false prophets will appear and fool many people; and many people's love will grow cold because of increased distance from *Torah*. But whoever holds out till the end will be delivered. And this Good News about the Kingdom will be announced throughout the whole world as a witness to all the *Goyim*. It is then that the end will come.... At that time, if someone says to you, 'Look! Here's the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' don't believe him. For there will

appear false Messiahs and false prophets performing great miracles- amazing things!- so as to fool even the chosen, if possible."

And we see technology gradually taking control of us, moving us closer to the prophesied "mark of the beast:"

Revelation 13:11-18

"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. It had two horns like those of a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence; and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, the one whose fatal wound had been healed. It performs great miracles, even causing fire to come down from heaven onto the earth as people watch. It deceives the people living on earth by the miracles it is allowed to perform in the presence of the beast, and it tells them to make an image honoring the beast that was struck by the sword but came alive again. It was allowed to put breath into the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could even speak; and it was allowed to cause anyone who would not worship the image of the beast to be put to death. Also it forces everyone- great and small, rich and poor, free and slave- to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead preventing anyone from buying or selling unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This is where wisdom is needed; those who understand should count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person, and its number is 666."

I am not giving this message to warn you against falling into the sins described in these Scriptures, since I am confident that you won't. I am giving it to warn you against becoming despondent as you see the prophecies unfold and you realize that you are not able to change much for the better. You may be asking yourself: "What is the purpose of my life at all, since what will happen in the end is pre-ordained?" It is a good question that deserves an answer.

First, we who know the truth and are willing to tell it to others are God's instruments to lead them to salvation. Remember that, in the Garden of Eden, God told Adam: "You may freely eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, it will become certain that you will die." (Genesis 2:16b-17). Mankind has been under a death sentence ever since Adam ate from the tree, and everything that has transpired since then, including these last days' happenings, is the result of God's grace in wanting to save those of us who are willing to do the reverse of what Adam did, by obeying God in a way that Adam did not. Until the very end, every person has the chance, during his or her lifetime, to do his or her part in reversing Adams' sin by being obedient to God, repenting of his or her own sins, by receiving Yeshua's atoning blood and, finally, living and walking with God forever, which was God's original plan.

What we are seeing in these last days, is a sorting out process that is the result of the New Covenant liberty that God has given us. Through it, God has stepped back and has allowed us to choose which way we will go. The sinfulness that is prevalent today is not new; it existed in Paul's day as well. Paul had no more ability to effect change in those who were sold out to sin than we have, yet he was not despondent. As a matter of fact he was optimistically proactive for, in Romans 11:13b-14, we read him to say: "I make known the importance of my work in the hope that somehow I may

provoke some of my own people to jealousy and save some of them!" Keep Paul's words in mind because Paul's mission of offering redemption to whomever would receive it, is our mission as well.

Meanwhile, believers and unbelievers alike will have to endure tribulation. Some teach that believers will be lifted out of what Revelations 7:13-17 calls "the great tribulation" or, as the CJB translates it, "the great persecution," but you can draw your own conclusions; here is what John writes about it:

"One of the elders asked me, "These people dressed in white robes- who are they, and where are they from?" "Sir," I answered, "you know." Then he told me, "These are the people who have come out of the Great Persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb. That is why they are before God's throne. Day and night they serve him in his Temple; and the One who sits on the throne will put his *Sh'khinah* upon them. They will never again be hungry, they will never again be thirsty, the sun will not beat down on them, nor will any burning heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will shepherd them, will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

I believe that this Scripture is speaking about believers who have come out of the tribulation with their faith intact. I do not think that believers will be spared persecution or any other hardship that unbelievers will endure because there are other Scriptures that warn us to be prepared for it:

Luke 21:34-36

"But keep watch on yourselves, or your hearts will become dulled by carousing, drunkenness and the worries of everyday living, and that Day will be sprung upon you suddenly like a trap! For it will close in on everyone, no matter where they live, throughout the whole world. Stay alert, always praying that you will have the strength to escape all the things that will happen and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man."

Acts 14:21-22

"After proclaiming the Good News in that city and making many people into *talmidim*, they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the *talmidim*, encouraging them to remain true to the faith, and reminding them that it is through many hardships that we must enter the Kingdom of God."

In these situations, Yeshua's words and later Paul's and Barnabas' words were spoken to *talmidim* – in other words, to disciples.

Young people – teens – those of you who are in your twenties – these Scriptures are speaking to you. They are not calling you to be afraid and hunker down, but rather to be "watchmen on the wall" – to be looking for the approaching armies of evil that are sure to attack us and, when you see them, to sound the alarm and do battle against them. We who are older are depending on your youth and your strength. Does the U.S. or the Israeli military recruit middle age or old men and women to be soldiers? Of course not; they want young people like you. The senior officers are usually older because their maturity and experience in battle is important in training and directing the younger soldiers, but they are the younger soldiers who aim and shoot the weapons. It is the

same in God's army. You who are young are our front line of defense and, if you don't stand guard, if you don't train for battle, and you don't fight when the enemies of God confront you, than we who are older and have sent you into the battle, will be overrun by the enemy along with you.

So yes, the end-times are upon us and, as prophesied, things are heating up in every quarter. None of us can stop the inevitable, which is that many (if not most) people in the world will be lost. But that is no reason to slack off of our mission to be ambassadors and soldiers for God, and help to save those whom we can. It is a war, and we are in it whether we want to be or not, so let's train for it with these watchwords of Peter in 2Peter 3:10-14:

"However, [he said,] the Day of the Lord will come "like a thief." On that Day the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will melt and disintegrate, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up. Since everything is going to be destroyed like this, what kind of people should you be? You should lead holy and godly lives, as you wait for the Day of God and work to hasten its coming. That Day will bring on the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt from the heat; but we, following along with his promise, wait for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness will be at home. Therefore, dear friends, as you look for these things, do everything you can to be found by him without spot or defect and at peace."