

How COVID-19 Foreshadows the Apocalypse

On Wednesday, April 1, AD 33, Jesus preached His final great sermon.

After a long, tense day of confrontation in the temple precincts with the religious leaders, Jesus and His beleaguered band of 12 made their way out of the temple area for the final time during His ministry. As they left, the disciples paused and pointed to the stunningly beautiful buildings on the temple mount. Then Jesus dropped a bombshell when He asked them, "Do you see all these things? ... Truly I tell you, not one stone here shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2).

Think about hearing someone predict the destruction of one of the iconic buildings of the modern world: the White House, the Empire State Building, Buckingham Palace, the Sydney Opera House, the Sistine Chapel or the Louvre. You'd be shocked. You would want some details, wouldn't you?

Desperately in search of more details about Jesus' forecast, the four closest disciples (Peter, James, John and Andrew) approached Him privately and asked, "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3).

"Jesus answered them, 'Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled. For all these things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, epidemics, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:4-8).

There is no place in the Bible that gives a clearer, more concise overview of what's going to happen during earth's final days than the basic outline of the last days Jesus gave in His Olivet Discourse. For that reason, it's often called the "mini-apocalypse."

Jesus said many things in this great discourse, but one big idea cannot be overlooked or dismissed: This world is not going to become a better place to live. Things are going to get bad—really bad—before they get better. Those who believe the world is going to get better and better are in for a rude awakening.

Times of almost unbelievable, unique calamity are on the horizon. Nothing in all of world history will compare to what is coming in the end of days. Jesus said it plainly. "For then will be great tribulation, such as has not happened since the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21). Jesus didn't pull any punches. No one can accuse Him of sugarcoating what lies ahead.

Deception, wars and natural disasters will increase exponentially in the end of days, telegraphing the return of Christ. Jesus called these the "beginning of birth pains" (Matt. 24:8b, NIV). In other words, these are the initial signs that the end is near, the beginning of the end.

Many people today believe the outbreak of the coronavirus is one of these beginning contractions Jesus predicted. For example, one Bible prophecy teacher, whom I like very much and is a friend of mine, said, "I believe what we are witnessing with COVID-19 is part of the birth pains Jesus talked about in the Olivet Discourse. In fact, I think it is a major birth pain, as is the locust plague that is ravaging Africa and the Mideast; as is the large number of social uprisings in countries around the world; as is the increase in earthquake activity; as were the record-breaking Australian wild fires; as is ... you get the picture. Birth pains increase in frequency

and intensity and continue to do so until the moment of delivery.” I understand his sentiment, and it’s one that’s held by many solid prophecy teachers.

My position is that I believe coronavirus is prophetically significant, but I don’t believe it’s one of the birth pains Jesus predicted in the His final sermon. I believe the birth pains will be fulfilled in the final days of tribulation that immediately precede the return of Jesus. I believe the coronavirus is a faint, yet frightening, foreshadow or preview of what’s coming.

Think of how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the world in such a short time. Multiply those weeks and months many times, and you’ll have a faint glimpse of how the birth-pain plagues will jar the world during the tribulation. The coronavirus is a small window into what is to come. The rapid spread of coronavirus and the ensuing panic show how ripe the world is for the contractions of deadly pestilence that will sweep the globe.

In His great end-time sermon, Jesus fortified His followers with farsighted courage. He adjusted their perspective. He listed the calamities of life but then pointed His disciples to the end. He encouraged and energized them with the truth of His coming. The birth pains are coming for sure. But when those birth pains are over, the delivery will come as Jesus returns and brings heaven to earth. “At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:27, MEV).

There’s something about knowing things will all work out in the end that strengthens us to stand strong and endure even in the midst of trying, turbulent times. Knowing and trusting in final triumph creates firm tenacity.

The world is shaking, and Jesus wants us to know that things are not going to get better in the short term. But for believers in Jesus Christ, the best is yet to come.

Don't lose faith in the end of story. No matter what happens. Our ultimate triumph in Jesus Christ is sure. {eoa}

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