

# Is COVID-19 a Sign of the Apocalypse?

I heard a story years ago about a man who visited the Upper Peninsula of Michigan with a friend. Stunned by the solitary beauty, he commented, "This looks like the end of the world." His friend replied, "It's not the end of the world, but I think you can see it from here."

That's how many people are feeling today. Even people with little or no religious belief or conviction have an uneasy, foreboding sense that doomsday is approaching.

They may be right. Scripture predicts events that will shake and shatter the foundations of society in the end times. The Bible urges us to pay attention to the crises in our world that will lead to the final events that must take place before Jesus returns. Among those future crises or catastrophes are pestilence, plagues and pandemics—like coronavirus.

As we observe and evaluate current events and world headlines in relation to signs of the times, we need to set up a few important guardrails to make sure we stay on the road and don't drive into the ditch. Let me suggest four principal parameters.

## **1. Seriousness, Not Sensationalism**

First, we must shun a sensationalistic approach to current events and world headlines. Any time there's a crisis or natural disaster such as COVID-19, a chorus of voices immediately begin to announce the advent of the Antichrist and imminent arrival of the apocalypse. For sensationalists, every earthquake, war, terrorist attack, disease, crime spree, famine, hurricane or tsunami is a flashing neon sign pointing to the end.

The problem with this is that if everything is a sign, then nothing is a sign. We can't manufacture every current event into a sign of the times. Doing so dilutes the serious impact and force of true, discernible signs outlined in Scripture.

## **2. Scripture First, Not Headlines**

Second, current events, headlines and world news must be assessed in light of the Bible, not the other way around.

Danger arises when people fall prey to the temptation to find some sensational event in the headlines and then go searching for some obscure Scripture, often wrenched out of context, to support what the news is reporting. That's reckless and irresponsible. We must consult the biblical blueprint for the end times first, and then responsibly look at world events and their correspondence, if any, to Scripture.

Of course, the most egregious, reckless form of prophetic pandering is setting dates for specific end-time events to occur. Every so often, someone comes along and sets a date for the return of Christ. They do this despite Jesus saying during His time on earth that even He didn't know the time of His Second Coming.

Date setters must be ignored and rejected.

## **3. Second Coming, Not the Rapture**

A third important principle for signs of the times is to remember that they relate directly to Jesus' Second Coming back to earth, not the rapture.

In the rapture, believers—both living and dead—will be taken up to meet Jesus in the air and accompany Him back to heaven. The rapture is an imminent event, meaning it could happen at any moment. The rapture and the return are two distinct phases or stages of the Second Coming of Christ, separated by the tribulation.

The signs of Christ's coming set forth in the New Testament deal with the return of Jesus to earth, not the rapture. None of the passages that describe the rapture include any mention of signs. So, what is the relationship, if any, of signs to the rapture?

Let me explain by using a simple illustration involving Christmas and Thanksgiving. When it comes to signs, the return of Christ is like Christmas. There are all kinds of signs that Christmas is drawing near.

The rapture, on the other hand, is like Thanksgiving. There are no specific signs for Thanksgiving, unless you're a turkey. Nevertheless, if it's late summer or early fall, and you begin to see signs for Christmas all around but Thanksgiving has not arrived, you know it must be near. In that way, escalating signs we see today, such as globalism, world focus on the Middle East, spiritual deception and even the coronavirus pandemic serve as a kind of prophetic overlap that points toward the rapture.

#### **4. Stage-Setting, Not Fulfillment**

One final parameter for signs of the times is that most of what we see today is not the direct fulfillment of end-time prophecy but rather a foreshadow of what will come after God's people have been raptured to heaven.

I believe coronavirus is part of the stage-setting for the end times. In that sense, it's a sign that points beyond itself to future events. For example, coronavirus is revealing the interconnectedness of the modern world as well as accelerating it.

The road to the apocalypse is lined with signs. Some of them are frightening and foreboding, such as a pandemic plague. Still, it's important for us to keep our eyes on the signs, even when we'd rather look away.

Yet, at the same time, we can't allow ourselves to get enamored with the signs. Signs are important, but they aren't all-important. Their only value is to point to something beyond themselves. Signs show us the way and lead us from where we are to where we want to be. And the ultimate place we want to be is with Jesus in His kingdom.

The signs are all pointing in the same direction: the coming of Jesus and a world recaptured by heaven. Take comfort—the best is yet to come. {eoa}

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