

## Where do we go from here?

The twenty-first century began with a long list of problems around the world. But there were catastrophes on the horizon that caught many by surprise. Who imagined that the Twin Towers would fall to terrorists, that major earthquakes would strike Indonesia, Haiti, Chile, New Zealand, Pakistan, and Japan, while the United States was hit by major storms and tornadoes? And what about banking greed, huge corporate bailouts, collapse of the housing market, long-running economic malaise, and governments facing bankruptcy? Meanwhile, politicians do little as government deficits skyrocket, the rich get richer, the middle class disappears, and the poor get poorer.

For the past century, technological and medical advances have been considered the driving forces behind improvements at every level of society. But it is becoming increasingly clear that negative side effects are increasing and threatening to overshadow the positives. Is there anything for the common person to hope for? Where? Let's discover what is on ...

# GOD'S AGENDA

## 1. What reassurance did Jesus give His followers?

*"Let not your heart be troubled.... In My Father's house are many mansion.... I go to prepare a place for you. And ... I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"* (John 14:1-3).<sup>1</sup> This is God's agenda!

## 2. What events did Jesus say would precede His return?

*"For then there will be great tribulation"* (Matthew 24:21). Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (which occurred in A.D. 70), war, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, false prophets and christs, and a dreadfully long period of persecution that would almost wipe out His true followers. The latter occurred during the Middle Ages.

<sup>1</sup> Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1981 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The King James Version is designated by KJV; other Bible versions are referred to by their full titles. All emphases and italics are ours.



*A building that survived the  
Lisbon earthquake*

### 3. What special signs in nature did Jesus say lay between that great tribulation and His return?

*“Immediately **after** the tribulation ... the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” “There was a **vast** earthquake; and the sun became dark like black cloth, and the moon was blood-red. Then the stars of heaven appeared to be falling to earth” (Matthew 24:29; Revelation 6:12-13 *The Living Bible, Paraphrased*). As persecution ceased in the middle of the 18th century, the first of these four events occurred.*

- a) On November 1, 1755, the most extensive earthquake known to man shook our planet. The Lisbon earthquake—felt in Europe, Africa, and North America—covered “at least four million square miles” and took approximately 90,000 lives. Since then, many earthquakes smaller in extent but costlier in lives have taken place.
- b) At midmorning on May 19, 1780, New England became as dark as a night without stars. Cows returned from the fields, birds stopped singing, and chickens retired to their roosts. That evening the full moon appeared as red as blood. Many feared it was the end of the world, but those who knew Jesus’ words recognized the sign.
- c) On the night of November 12-13, 1833, shooting stars, or meteors, bombarded the sky over nearly the entire United States for several hours with an intensity that has never been witnessed before or after.
- d) *“The powers of the heavens will be shaken”* (Matthew 24:29). This event is still in the future.



#### 4. And after that?

*“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear ... and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 24:30).*

#### 5. What current events and developments unmistakably show that Christ’s return is near?

*“There will be ... distress of nations, with perplexity, ... men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming” (Luke 21:25-26).*

- **While populations increase, resources dwindle**

Oil, the undisputed basis of our modern civilization, has no viable substitute. Soon the whole world will be faced with a serious shortage of petroleum.<sup>2</sup>

- **Wars**

World Wars I and II, in spite of great efforts for peace, took more than 100 million lives. Nuclear weapons cause much fear. On September 11, 2001, the global threat of terrorism dawned. Nations are arming themselves for Armageddon.<sup>3</sup>

- **Environmental decay**

- a) Earth’s temperatures are rising worldwide, causing great concern.<sup>4</sup>
- b) The ozone layer, which protects life from radiation, is shrinking.
- c) Many living organisms—both plant and animal—are rapidly becoming extinct.
- d) Rivers, forests (suppliers of oxygen), and large ocean reefs are dying or disappearing.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> “The world won’t be able to meet the projected demand ... for one simple reason: We’re using up oil at breakneck speed.” *The BP Statistical Review of World Energy.*

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 24:6; Revelation 16:12-16.

<sup>4</sup> This disarray of nature will culminate in the coming seven last plagues. See Revelation 16:8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 107:33-34.



- **Disease**

Cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and AIDS are still widespread.<sup>6</sup> SARS and the West Nile Virus have taken their toll. Each year 400,000 Americans die of tobacco-related diseases. That's nine times the number of people who die from traffic accidents.

- **Social order is deteriorating world-wide**

Families are in crisis; school massacres, corporate fraud, riots, and bombings occur all over the world.<sup>7</sup>

- **Personal hope is growing dim**

In 2000, about 3 million American teens (13 percent) ages 14 to 17 thought seriously about or actually attempted suicide. As of 2004, an estimated 500,000 teenagers tried to kill themselves every year, and about 5,000 succeeded. That's right up there with cancer and homicide. Even five-year-olds kill themselves! Studies have shown that as much as 50 percent of the general public has seriously considered suicide. All in all, 29,000 people kill themselves in the U.S. every year.

## 6. How many Biblical prophecies are yet to be fulfilled before Christ returns?

Besides that of Christ's second coming, only one major prophecy remains unfulfilled. It's found in Revelation 13. We will study it later, in Lesson 21.

## 7. How does Jesus want us to respond to these deteriorating world conditions?

They can be depressing. Yet Jesus said, "*Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near*" (Luke 21:28). Jesus promised to return to judge the world and deliver His people.

<sup>6</sup> "And there will be ... pestilences" (Matthew 24:7).

<sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 3:1-5.



## 8. What positive sign did Jesus give to indicate His soon return?

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come”* (Matthew 24:14). Modern transportation and communication facilitate the spreading of God’s message of hope to the ends of the world.

## 9. What future is everyone invited to enjoy?

Revelation 21

*“I saw a new heaven and a new earth”* (verse 1).

*“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them’”* (verse 3).

*“And he ... showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”* (verses 10-11).

*“The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones”* (verses 18-19).

*“The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it”* (verses 21-23).

*“Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there)”* (verse 25).

Revelation 22:1-3

*“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits.... And there shall be no more curse.”*

Soon, after Christ has come, He will recreate our world and restore it to its original perfection and beauty! Then our longing for a better world will be realized. Faith in Him enables us to look forward to His return with joyful anticipation. It’s our privilege to rest on God’s Word, the only sure thing this world knows.



## 10. Meanwhile, are peace and happiness available in a world threatened by universal disaster?

Yes, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed.”*

*“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (Psalm 46:1-2; John 14:27).

While our happiness cannot be perfect as long as this world is filled with sorrow, we may possess inner peace even when surrounded by trouble.

And there is great happiness in doing what we can to help others.

## 11. What was Christ's parting promise?

*"I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"* (Matthew 28:20 KJV).

What about ...

# THE WORLD TO COME?

- **How eager is God to have us look forward to a better world?**

The Old Testament foretold Christ's first coming about 125 times, and He came at the exact time and in the exact manner specified. There are about 2,500 Bible references to His *second* coming, about 20 times more than to His first. Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"* (Matthew 24:35).

- **Are there requirements for admission to Christ's everlasting kingdom?**

Yes. Since we won't feel comfortable there if we don't know Him and don't fit in, God promises to change us and teach us how to live so we will blend naturally into His kingdom of love and peace. In His Word, our great God gave us 90,000 promises to encourage us to get to know Him.

Lesson 2, "When Christ Comes," will reassure you that Jesus **is** coming again. in great glory, according to "God's Agenda." He will wrap up this world's history of sin, turn distress into joy and hope into reality, and take His children home to heaven.

### Any other questions?

If you have other questions, or comments, please feel free to write us. In some cases, we may point you forward to upcoming lessons that will discuss the subject you are asking about.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

Up to now we have asked questions that the Bible has answered for you. At the end of each study, you will find some questions to check your learning. Please answer them and send them to us so we can help you with any misunderstandings. Note that multiple-choice questions may have more than one correct answer. *Circle the letters of all correct answers.*

**1. What is the greatest of all known future events?**

- a) World peace before Christ returns.
- b) Armageddon.
- c) The return of Christ.

**2. What four events in nature did Jesus say would come after the tribulation, before He returns?**

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. How many of these natural events have already happened?**

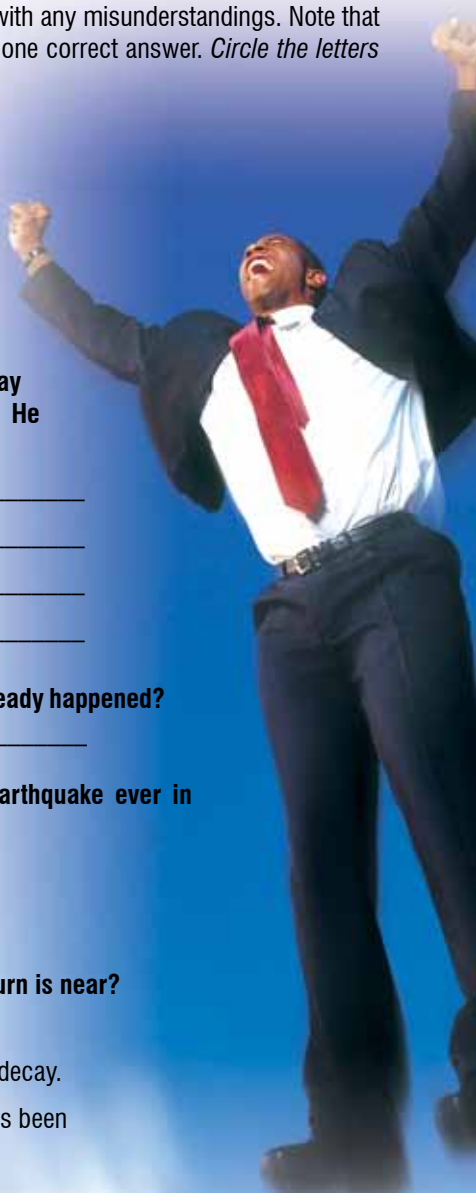
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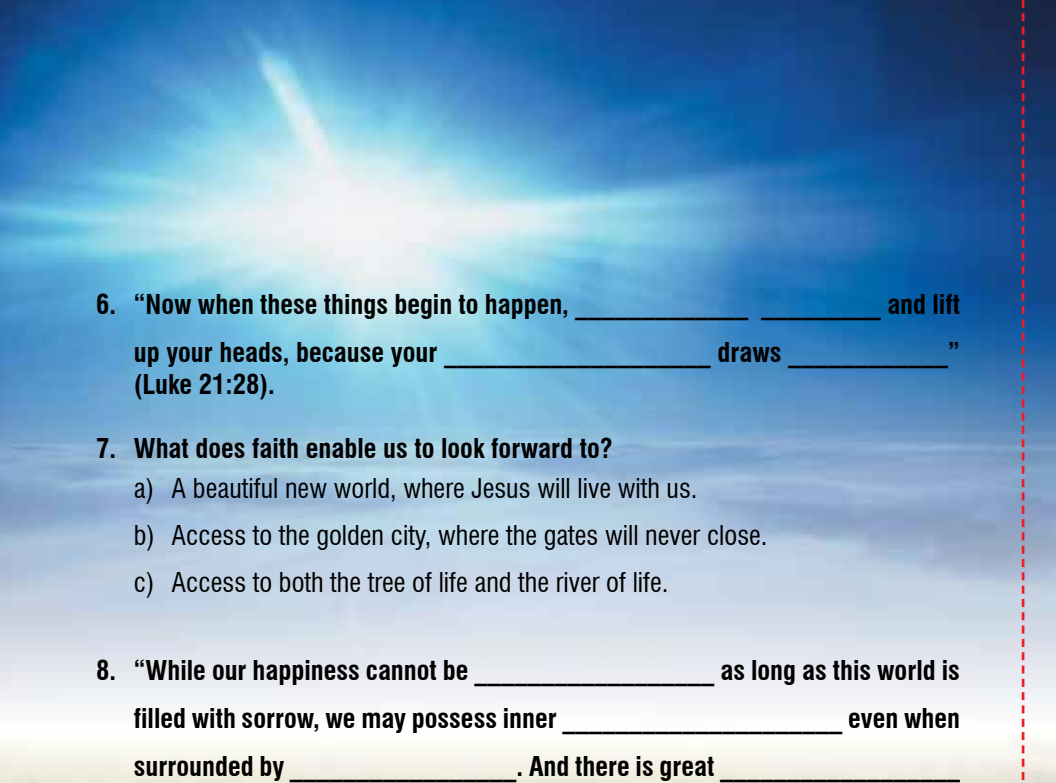
**4. The Lisbon earthquake is the greatest earthquake ever in terms of ...**

- a) the number of fatalities.
- b) the area it covered.

**5. What developments show that Christ's return is near?**

- a) War and immorality.
- b) Dwindling resources and environmental decay.
- c) All prophecies are fulfilled; the gospel has been preached to the whole world.
- d) People are sick and losing hope.





6. “Now when these things begin to happen, \_\_\_\_\_ and lift up your heads, because your \_\_\_\_\_ draws \_\_\_\_\_” (Luke 21:28).

7. What does faith enable us to look forward to?

- a) A beautiful new world, where Jesus will live with us.
- b) Access to the golden city, where the gates will never close.
- c) Access to both the tree of life and the river of life.

8. “While our happiness cannot be \_\_\_\_\_ as long as this world is filled with sorrow, we may possess inner \_\_\_\_\_ even when surrounded by \_\_\_\_\_. And there is great \_\_\_\_\_ in doing what we can to \_\_\_\_\_ others.”



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