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The Bible Doom & Gloom Syndrome: A Reputation Undeserved

B y W i l f r e d H a h n

A frustrated comment that we sometimes hear is this: Why all the doom and gloom in sermons and prophecy? Why the heavy admonitions and scare tactics? Following our recent articles, we feel we should respond. As such, we briefly interrupt our series “Burning Alight: 12 Endtime Fuses.” People appear to be reacting to what they perceive as a heavy weight when reading about worrisome world trends and the Bible’s seemingly incessant apocalyptic prophecies.



What’s more, people see themselves trapped to these developments. Given that the Bible is true and it indeed prophesies apocalyptic events, then God must have pre-determined that these must happen. They ask: What god would condemn the world of his creation in this way?

With such a fatalistic perspective, people will understandably plead that it would be better that they didn’t know about the uncertainties of worldwide developments or the specifics of Bible

prophecies. They may reason that one cannot worry about something one doesn’t know about. This does not necessarily mean people only prefer to hear smooth things (Isaiah 30:10). They may simply be weary of the responsibilities of knowledge, so much so, that they identify with the lament of the author of Ecclesiastes, who wrote: “For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief” (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

We can stop right there in these laments. Why? Because the Bible provides a clear and certain answer to all of



them, showing that these expressed concerns are misplaced ... and perhaps even the result of wrong teachings.

The World Is No Blissful Place

Jesus plainly said: “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). So, to begin this topic, we first know that there is no such reliable thing as bliss on earth. We cannot change this by living in denial. The fact of the matter is that Christians must expect that they “will have trouble” in this world. This means that many developments on earth, whether prophesied in the Bible or not,

wonderful. It promises reward and eternal life to those whose names are in the “Book of Life,” not ever blotting them out (Revelation 3:5). Is this emblematic of a pessimistic document?

The above statements of the Bible testify to a God who throughout mankind’s history has repeatedly stepped in with new dispensations due to mankind’s failures ... even regarding that “[...] it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (John 11:50). It is in this context that we must view prophecies and their purpose.



will be far from blissful. But isn’t this perspective a pessimistic one?

The Bible Not a Pessimistic Document

We can be thankful that negative reactions to the Bible’s messages and prophecies are certainly not for reasons of what the Bible actually says. To start, the Bible is not a “pessimistic” document. Far from it. Rather, it is a document that testifies to hope.

Scripture consistently proclaims salvation, a glorious hope (Ephesians 1:18) and a blessed hope (Titus 2:13). It stands for Truth, the oppressed, the captives, the poor, for justice and unconditional forgiveness. It is a Book that steadfastly points to an end that will be

Bible Prophecy and Love

Why then do so many people react negatively, feeling such “doom and gloom” when they hear of Bible prophecy ... of disasters and trends of “Biblical proportions”? There may be a number of reasons.

Firstly, what often is omitted, we think, is the main foundational cornerstone of the Bible—love and mercy.

God of the Bible does not want anyone to be lost, much less go through the Tribulation; neither Armageddon nor Hades; nor to be thrown into the eternal “lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

Scripture is clear on this point. For example: “[...] he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Christ himself made this clear, saying “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God wants people to perish. Why? “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

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Scripture and prophecy, when taught and preached in a spirit of love—this including the mission of providing warnings—encourages repentance. Cheap emotions born of sensationalist scare tactics will not be so effective or lasting. Sadly, one does encounter so-called Bible teachers who exult in the idea that the wicked will perish. They delight in the notion of Armageddon, of the mass slaughter that is coming to the unbelievers. There is no spirit of love in such sensationalism.

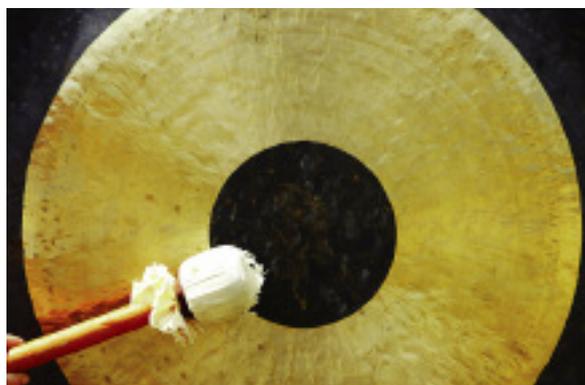
A second (and primary) reason why many “turn off” to Bible prophecy, thinking it incessantly pessimistic, is because people (both Christians and non-believers) misinterpret and misuse Bible prophecy. They ignore the warning to “not go beyond what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6). Doing so, they themselves prophesy in their speculative interpretations of prophetic fulfillments. We noted one publication recently that goes so far as to claim that it is “prophesying” in its interpretations of Bible prophecy. In so doing, they will undoubtedly mislead people and discredit the Bible.

The more there are speculations, the more Bible prophecy is discredited as over-hyped doom & gloom. Such sensationalism can lead to prophecy “burn out” (as happened to this writer early in his adult life).

The very last book of the Bible before John’s Apocalypse, Jude, holds this place for a reason, just as Genesis holds the position of the first book of the Bible. And, what is its final message? “Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh” (Jude 1:22-23).

In no uncertain terms, Jude tells us to snatch people from the fire, to show mercy and to do this to the very last moment that the Church is on earth. This is diametrically opposite to the scare tactics of “doom and gloom” (apart from the warnings of being lost for eternity because of our sins). Sensationalism born out of commercialism and tactics to pull in crowds to the pew is false love.

To conclude these points, the proclaiming of the Gospel, Bible prophecy and its inherent warnings must be done in the spirit of love ... the goal being to save the lost. People can only be ex-



pected to reject what will be perceived as frustrating condemnations.

In all we do, love is to be the overriding motive (this also applying to prophecy teachers). Apostle Paul makes this vital point, saying: “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2).

Prophecy: Foreknowledge or Predestination?

Next, we turn to the oft-expressed lament that prophecy is destiny ... i.e. that mankind is helplessly condemned

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to perform all that is prophesied. Since all Bible prophecy will be fulfilled, does this not then mean that mankind is condemned to these events with no choice? This is a serious question to ponder.

As God foreknows the future choices of mankind, this does not mean that God is condemning mankind to making such decisions. Bible prophecy in large part is God knowing in advance the choices that we humans will make. As He lives outside the bounds of linear time, God recognizes the freewill choices of mankind in advance. Yes, the prophecies of the Holy Spirit will always be fulfilled, but only because mankind chose these outcomes (rather than being predestined to do so). This is an all-important distinction.

For example, living in America, people may feel that God has decreed that the U.S. as a society is irreversibly condemned to greater immorality, godlessness and global decline. Furthermore, that since the end times are here, a decline to greater faithlessness and apostasy must therefore continue uninterrupted. And, since these prophesied trends are all so fatalistic and futile, there is little one can do.

That view is not correct. Why? It denies that both individuals and societies have the choice to change their ways. God is not an author of evil, nor does He condemn anyone to do evil. It must not necessarily be our current generation that brings about the unwise choices of mankind that will be fulfilled. What if there was a turning back to God? Would it be possible for America to become a more God-fearing nation? Why not? It would be a matter of choice.

In this respect, we were exhilarated to view the courageous speech of Pastor Rabbi Cahn at the 2013 National Prayer Breakfast. President Obama was in the

room, as were many other politicians. It would be hard to imagine that their convictions weren't challenged by such a straight-talking, uncompromising, true-to-the-Bible, sermon. This was not the message of a "smiling" nor "want-to-be-everybody's-friend" preacher. Time will tell if such compelling sermons given at such high levels will have an impact.

We return to the main point: At the very least, there is a choice to be made for every person under the aegis of the Holy Spirit. We are not all going to the same place, a view that is maintained by other religions of the world. We are not individually condemned to reject God and to involuntarily suffer the consequences. We can acknowledge that we are sinners; that we must repent; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who is our Lord.

When the Holy Spirit inspired prophets to utter prophecies concerning the future choices of individuals, whether the leaders of nations or mankind overall, these were all the expressions of the foreknowledge of God. We are still given a choice that we are free to make. We are free to rebel or to comply. We are free to worship God and accept his grace through Jesus Christ or not.

Therefore, when the Bible says that faith "will wax cold" (Matthew 24:12), or that the nations of the world will collude against God (Psalm 2:1-3), these are not predictions or immutable predestinations for any individual or specific time. These all occur because of the choices of mankind, whether anguished or by default. This may all seem an enigma to the human mind. Yet, it is consistent with a God who indeed loves the world and "rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).



A Call to Watch and Preach Prophecy

Salvation is an undeserved gift from He who has “the power [...] that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Roman 1:16). But is this simply an insurance policy that requires nothing more of us? Does salvation provide us the license to slumber ... to turn off and drop out ... to seek the blissful life here on earth? Not according to the words of Jesus Christ.

In the first instance, we note that Jesus castigated the Pharisees and Sadducees because they did not recognize the “season.” He said: “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:2-3).

If this was a criticism of people of that earlier time, it would only follow that Christians of today should similarly have an onus to “interpret the signs of the times.” It would be unlikely that the Church, which has been inserted into the salvation timeline by God for an appointed period, should not be able to recognize the “signs of the times.” This perspective confirms that Bible prophecy is indeed given as “a light shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19), and that it is required that we study it and “discern the times” (Matthew 16:3).

Doing so should not instill fear in the saved Christian, but rather provide confirmation that the “blessed hope” is ever nearer, the time ever shorter to “snatch people from the fire.”

Jesus implores his people to “watch.” Just what are we to watch? We are to watch for prophesied events and markers. On at least six occasions, Jesus urged his disciples to “watch” the times in the context of being prepared for his return (Matthew 24:42, 25:13; Mark



13:33, 35; Luke 21:36, 38). We cannot deny Jesus’ emphasis of this command.

Yet, the Bible also emphasizes that we cannot know the exact time of Christ’s return (Rapture)—what “hour,” the “day nor hour,” the “time,” whether “at midnight,” or “at the cockcrowing” or “in the morning,” or “the second watch or third watch,” or before “things that shall come to pass.”

It is clear, therefore, that Christ calls us to watch ... not to predict. And, watching should allow us to assess the trends of our times ... to observe the “season” and “the appearance of the sky,” no matter how worrisome.

Points to Ponder

We have responded to the “doom gloom” syndrome by making five main points. Firstly, the Bible commands us to “watch” and to discern the season of the times. It is OK to continue to study prophecy and to watch for the “season.” While none of us are absolved from the task to “watch” and to “discern the

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We are to continue “snatching people from the fire,” not with condemnations of prophecy but with love. We are to pray for the lost, even those committing evil and supposedly the great conspirators, according to the many conspiracy theorists.



times,” some are specifically called to the task of “watching.” Is there proof for this view?

Christ tells us of the parable of the man who goes away on a long trip. This man “gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch” (Mark 13:34). Here we see that everyone had their assignments, the porter specifically being called to “watch.” The key message of this parable was this: “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning” (verse 35).

Secondly, as Christians, we have been given a great hope, salvation and the promise of eternal life. This is cause for rejoicing, not pessimism, no matter the wickedness of the times. Thirdly, we live in the world only a short time ... a time of trouble and striving. There is no escaping this reality.

For Christians specifically, there are no promises of peace or final rest in this current dispensation. The original apos-

les had a diametrically opposite view to the popular blissful message of “Live your best life now” that emanates from some pulpits today. Said Paul: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17). But: “Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses” (2 Corinthians 6:4).

Continuing with our five conclusions, fourthly, we are to continue “snatching people from the fire,” not with condemnations of prophecy but with love. We are to pray for the lost, even those committing evil and supposedly the great conspirators, according to the many conspiracy theorists. Finally, the Bible’s prophecies foreknow our choices and that of mankind. We are not condemned to doom and gloom involuntarily. We must diligently make our own choices. If He be God, serve Him.

Just as the disciples could not stay awake during the night of Christ’s abduction in the Garden of Gethsemane, so Christ’s Church will likely be found asleep at another very crucial time ... that of His Second Return. The very last words of Christ to us in the Book of Mark are these: “What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

“If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping” (Mark 13:36). Let us not let Him find us inactive, but rather snatching people from the fire and looking for the “blessed hope.” By God’s grace and mercy, we will continue doing so. Let us not be “tuned out” nor cause others to “turn off” the gospel message, because of any improper perspectives of Bible prophecy. (MC)

(In the next issue, we will resume with the third part of the series, “Burning Alight: 12 Endtime Fuses.”)