
When Jesus Returns

Last year, I faced considerable apprehension among the local prisoners I was visiting, over the fear that the world would come to an end, coinciding with the end of the Mayan calendar. However, the predictions of men who set dates concerning this momentous event always fail, whether of pagan or of misguided Christian origin. There is no need to heed those who claim to know dates that God has hidden from us.

That's one side of it. The other side of the issue commands full alert. For there is indeed one event that will signal the end of the world, and the unfolding of the judgment of God. It is the day when the resurrected Christ, the Son of God, who ascended to His Father nearly two thousand years ago, will return again in the clouds with power and great glory. This is based on the same reality as the creation of the world by the Word of God. That God's Word is true, was again confirmed when He brought the destruction of the worldwide flood. But the greatest assurance of all, in relation to end-time events is that the grave could not hold the crucified Christ. Once dead, He is now alive forevermore. That is the full assurance that the end of the world and the return of Christ will surely come to pass.

This event is much like death. The fact that we do not know the day of our appointment does not change the reality of the event. What will that time be like?

"But as the days of No-e were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that No-e entered into the ark. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37-39).

"Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:28-30).

So, what were those days like? The generations of Noah and Lot lived in denial. That is why the catastrophe of flood waters, and the fire and brimstone upon Sodom, came like a bombshell on a totally unsuspecting population. They "knew not" until the flood (or fire), in all fury, burst upon them. But once the rains began to fall, the door to the ark was already shut. It was too late to be saved. Thus it was with Sodom and Gomorrah. There was no exit from the tragedy after Lot was gone—only death and judgment raining from the sky.

But the fact that "they did not know" is not the same as "could not have known." The difference between what was unknowable versus what was willfully scorned is a personal, inward one. They were still accountable to God. Noah and his wife, his sons, and his sons' wives, did know. Not only did they know—they knew how to avoid the tragedy that befell earth's population, possibly numbering many millions.

I'd like to cite an example of what it means *not to know*. On a given day, two drivers may access the same highways and face similar traffic patterns. They are supposedly obligated to the same laws and the same rules of the road. Both vehicles and equipment are in excellent function. Yet one of the drivers lives and the other dies.

Our first driver is purposeful. She moves in harmony with traffic signals and is alert to traffic flow, both around and before her, and is ever responsive to all that unfolds.

Our second driver is out for thrills. He is enthralled with the deep rumble of power under the hood. He is reckless and impatient, with an attitude. He is distracted by other interests, even while

overextending youthful driving skills. He exudes personal indestructibility. So on this beautiful day, which of these drivers died “not knowing?”

The two drivers did have much in common, as Noah’s family had with the people of his times. They lived in the same prosperous culture, traveled the same routes, likely shopped the same markets, and ate the foods typical of the population. They, too, had married, for unlike the time of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, marriage apparently was still the hallmark of their culture.

Now Noah was a builder, as were many of his generation. Prosperous times and population growth lend themselves to a building boom. We would expect that Noah’s equipment and building materials would have common sources with other builders. But there was one difference, one that would ultimately separate them forever. Everyone, except Noah, was building with an earthly outlook, vision restricted to personal enjoyment. They built according to the only code they knew—what could be more secure than the earth? In normal times, the earth outlasts every house built upon it. But what about when the reverse is true, when the house must survive a worldwide catastrophic flood? In that case, *normal* is madness and would lead to destruction.

Noah’s building project was different. *Normal* would have seemed like madness. His “building” must rise above deadly flood waters. Built according to divine plan and carefully fitted together in every part, it was sealed inside and out against the ravages of the flood to come. During this time, the entire world around Noah appeared very normal. The whole world went after the good times. But Noah knew that sudden destruction was as certain as the sunshine of a normal day. Thus Noah’s “house,” when complete, would readily lift above the world that would perish in the rising flood.

Noah’s ark took a long time in building—one hundred twenty years. The flood is frequently viewed as the act of a callous, unmerciful God. But the opposite is true. He is not willing that any should perish and takes no delight in the death of the wicked. That one hundred twenty-year span marks the time of God’s patience—a continuing interlude of mercy. Justice was on hold that men might turn from ungodliness. That deluded generation was without excuse. Noah was preparing to leave, while they were intent only on staying. His careful building of the ark was demonstrative evidence that the coming flood could be survived. (We are living proof of that fact. Since we are the descendants of Noah, we are here to tell about it). Finally, Noah was a preaching builder. His integrity was complete. 1. He knew the ark was God’s plan. 2. He built on that plan. 3. He faithfully declared salvation by the ark. Thus, Noah’s generation was confronted both with judgment to come, and the opportunity to be saved. Still, they would not take warning either in seeing, or hearing. They would “know” only after the rains began to fall—too late.

So how did it come to that? Genesis 6:1-12 traces the fall of that ancient civilization. They pursued self-gratification contrary to their godly heritage. They fell for the allure of romantic love and marriage to beautiful women. This sort of “fun” disobedience seemed to enhance intellectualism and exceptionalism, but failed them utterly by distorting the truth of God in relation to human well-being. No surprise then, that wickedness and evil imaginations built up into a steady lawlessness and violence. Thus, they faced the peril of “not knowing.” They could no longer understand demonstrative evidence that the good times could be stretched no further.

So shall the coming of the Son of Man be. The end of the Mayan calendar brought idle fears. The return of Christ is validated in the faithful Word and works of God. Our generation already lives on an edge that can no longer support the weight of its sins. Yet for the moment, God is still holding out in patience and mercy. Why not cast off blind “not knowing,” for the light of the great coming again of the Lord Jesus to judge the quick and the dead? We bid you in Jesus’ name—be reconciled to God.

~Lester Troyer