

ECOLOGICAL DISASTER: WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

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Introduction

Only a century ago, many Bible commentators, thinking the disasters in prophecy unrealistic, saw Jesus' description in Matt 24 as just the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70; strange locusts of Rev 9 as just Turks invading Europe; thought world getting better. Since then, the 20th cen has brought us WWs 1 and 2, nuclear weapons, some of the worst totalitarian states in history, producing a more sober view of world situation. In 1979, Isaac Asimov's *A Choice of Catastrophes* published, listed about 15 possible disasters (some far in future, some poss nearby), sorted into 5 classes:

- 1st class: universe becomes uninhabitable
- 2nd class: solar system becomes uninhabitable
- 3rd class: earth becomes uninhabitable
- 4th class: human life is destroyed
- 5th class: civilization is destroyed

Want to look at some disasters which are impending today, which are being taken seriously by scientists & politicians

Some Potential Disasters (statistics from *World Almanac* and *Science News*)

Nuclear War: none of superpowers wants it, but there is more than enough armament to have a good one, and no surefire guarantee that one couldn't start by accident; don't know what all of the effects would be; many killed by blast, many more by fallout of radiation; nuclear winter scenario being investigated; big problem coming up is that of nuclear proliferation: 32 countries are using nuclear power (incl Cuba, Iran, Pakistan); others are experimenting to develop nuclear weapons capability (Israel, Iraq at least, prob Libya); may get terrorist groups trying nuc blackmail soon

Ozone Depletion: life on earth protected from deadly UV radiation by layer of ozone (O₃) in upper atmosphere; this is being depleted by several chemicals produced by mankind (various oxides of nitrogen and refrigerant chemicals called CFCs); already getting "hole" in ozone layer in polar regions during part of year; Antarctic hole in 1988 allowed twice normal UV, think 1987 hole was much worse (4-5x normal UV); occurrence of skin cancers has risen by 93% since 1980; may be due to increased UV

Greenhouse Effect: explain name; earth has always had a beneficial greenhouse effect, temp about 35° above that w/o effect; but now CO₂ and other gases accumulating from modern technology (carbon dioxide up over 10% in 30 years, nitrous oxide rising 2-3% per decade); not sure how much effect on temp this has had yet, because many weather stations now more downtown than earlier; but in century of temperature records, six hottest years have

occurred in 1980s: 88, 87, 81=83, 80, 86; since 1880s, global land Ts up 1.2° F; if T trend of last 20 yrs continues for next 20, will have warmest weather in past 100,000 years! will warm poles most, produce very dry weather in interior of continents, prob messing up agriculture; during coldest part of ice ages, ave T only 8° F colder; water frozen and stored in glaciers, so that sea level then hundreds of feet lower; if all glacial ice today melted, sea level would rise several hundred feet more (I calc about 600 ft: Antarctica has area of 5.5 mill sq mi; whole earth 57.9; ave ice depth in Antarctic 2000 meters, so almost 200 m rise in sea level if all melted)

AIDS: a viral infection that crashes human immune machinery; first spread among homosexuals, perhaps coming from bestiality with monkeys in Africa; now has moved into IV drug community, from which it can spread thru heterosexual intercourse and childbirth to broader population; cases thought to be heavily underreported in central Africa; in Feb 1988, 21 countries reported over 200 cases each, US highest with 55K, GB 9th with 1.2K; a year later US cases had grown over 50% to 87K; in NYC, 60% of IV drug users tested were infected; app virus is transported in human white blood cells; RAND Corp estimates that AIDS hosp care in US over period 1986-91 will cost \$37 billion

Earthquakes: no evidence that number or their force increasing at present; but subjective increase due to growing world population; if SF earthquake repeated today, far more loss of life and property

Pollution/Toxins: both growing technology and growing terrorist activity could produce disaster here; some items: modern Americans and Britons have 500-1000x more Pb in bones than Amerinds of 700-1300 yrs ago; long-term, heavy alcohol use damages heart muscles in 1/3 drinkers, skeletal muscles in almost 1/2; dioxins (some of most powerful carcinogens known) app getting around in paper used in milk cartons & coffee filters; recent poisoned grape scare definitely linked to terrorism; earlier poisoned medicine scare certainly closely observed by them

Conclusions

These disasters have some real similarity to disasters pictured in Matthew 24 and Revelation: wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes, darkness, sun scorching people; might be the way God will bring these about

But Bible pictures a worse disaster ahead for those who continue to live as though God doesn't exist: Luke 13, parable of fruitless fig tree in vineyard