

Terrible Times In The Last Days

“Our earth is degenerate in these latter days. There are signs that the world is speedily coming to an end. Bribery and corruption are common. Children no longer obey their parents. Every man wants to write a book, and the end of the world is evidently approaching.”

“We are living in a decadent and dying age. Youth is corrupt, lacking in respect for elders, impatient of restraint. Age-old truth is doubted and the teaching of the fathers is questioned. The signs of the time forecast the destruction of the world at an early date.”

“Large numbers of these youngsters belong to organized gangs of thieves and cut-throats, and are in the regular employ of old criminals who teach them the tricks of the trade. Many such have no homes. Some cannot even return to the gang’s headquarters, unless the day’s profit amounts to a stipulated sum. From these thousands of young desperadoes, the chief mass of hardened criminals is recruited. Half the number of persons actually convicted of crimes are youths who have not reached the age of discretion.”

“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”

In view of the foregoing, who can deny that the end is near?

The first quotation was inscribed on a tablet about 4800 years ago (2800 B. C.) now in the Municipal Museum at Istanbul. The second was inscribed in an Egyptian tomb ten centuries B. C. The third was written in 1831 as quoted in *The Atlantic Monthly* of December, 1926. The fourth was a cautioning of Paul for Timothy, not us, to have nothing to do with that kind of people whose sins prevailed in his generation in the last days of Judaism before their nation was destroyed (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Consider another “modern” outcry: “In the good old days every man’s son born in wedlock was brought up, not in the chamber of some hired nurse, but in his mother’s lap and at her knee, and that mother could have no higher praise than that she managed the house and gave herself to her children. Nowadays, on the other hand, our children are handed over at birth to some silly little servant maid with a male slave, who may be anyone, to help her, quite frequently the most worthless member of the whole establishment, incompetent for any serious service. Yes, and the parents themselves make no effort to train their little ones in goodness and self-control. They grow up in an atmosphere of laxness and pertness in which they come gradually to lose all sense of shame and all respect, both for themselves and other people. Again, there are the peculiar and characteristic vices of this metropolis of ours taken on, as it seems to me, almost in the mother’s womb, the passion for play actors and the mind for gladiatorial shows and horse racing. When the mind is engrossed in such occupations, what room is left for higher pursuits?” By substituting such modern words as *baby-sitter*, *day care*, *movie stars*, *basketball*, and *video games* this description by the historian Tacitus (d. 117 A.D.) would describe our present generation.

Some of these quotations are selected from the many given in a radio lesson, *The Good Old Days*, by W. L. Oliphant on KRLD, Dallas, Nov. 1, 1942. I shall adapt other of his thoughts also.

“Indulged, petted, and uncontrolled at home, allowed to trample upon all laws, human and divine, at school, the student comes to college often with an undisciplined mind and an uncultivated heart, yet with exalted ideas of personal dignity and scowling contempt for local authority and wholesome restraint.” That commentary was by a professor of Davidson College in 1855.

Dr. Will Durant, describing the period following World War I, said: “Hope faded away; the generation which had lived through the war could no longer believe anything; a wave of apathy and cynicism engulfed all but the youngest and least experienced souls. The idea of progress seemed now to be one of the shallowest delusions that has ever mocked man’s misery, or lifted him up to a vain idealism and a monstrous futility.” (Harper’s, Nov. 1926).

Add another war: “Our world has never experienced such fearful times. It would seem that we are about to destroy ourselves. Following the awful war, if any nation survives, it will be blasted by such evils as to make life near unbearable. Immorality, licentiousness, disrespect for orderly government, disintegration of home life – these must and will follow World War II to such a degree as they have never before been witnessed.”

There seems to be an inherent self-centeredness in mankind that makes him feel that this universe will not outlast him. He thinks ideally that times past are the “good old days” and that mankind has lost its innocence in whatever age the person lives. Bible believers have tended to support those perceptions by Biblical prooftexts and have interpreted all sorts of natural disasters and social and political upheavals in their generation and locale as being evidence that a catastrophic end is impending. You just might, perchance, have heard a few of those alarmists in this generation! A hundred or several thousand years from now, the twentieth century criers of doom may seem as amusing as those of the second century A. D. or 2800 B.C. are to us. And ten thousand years from now, there may still be doleful warnings of an impending cosmic dissolution.

Centuries before Christ, Solomon advised, “**Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this**” (Ecc. 7:10). He also reminds us of the endless, repetitious cycle of history: “**What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new?’ It has been already, in the ages before us. There is no remembrance of former things...**” (Ecc. 1:9-11). Being centered on the present, we are forgetful of the corruption of former ages and we idealize them as *the good old days*.

Solomon was not writing of inventions but of the general cycle of nature and of man’s efforts to gain satisfaction in it. There is no evidence that the morality of mankind or that his pursuit of happiness has changed throughout his existence on this earth. As each individual has been whirled in his brief spin in the cycle of time, his circumstance of locale, race, culture, and age might have differed from others, but universally the conditions have been similar.

We are not making light of evil. We are affirming that the depravity of man has been equally evident in all ages. We are distressed to see immorality and corruption

become so accepted in our society, but it is not new to our society, nor is it equally true of all current cultures. In our time in the Western nations, freedom of speech and investigative reporting exploit the depravity of mankind. The Bible, however, reveals the evils of societies from the beginning of history. Secular history, though more suppressed and lacking in access to information, leaves no doubt about the perversity of man.

What worse time and situation could we point to than the garden of Eden after the fall when the earth's total population was corrupted. Shortly thereafter one out of four persons on earth hated his brother enough to kill him. Noah lived in a corrupt society. At some time in history God gave the pagan nations up to dishonorable passions (Rom. 1-2). However, God has always had his remnant who have brought restoration and uprightness to prominence. As corrupt as our present society seems to be, there are probably more true believers today than at any time since Jesus walked the earth. In spite of the rebellious youth of the sixties in our country, there is a swelling number of youth today who are devoting their lives to God.

The following lines (unclaimed by any writer for obvious reason!) are more expressive of truth than of poetic artistry:

My grandpa notes the world's worn cogs
And says we're going to the dogs.
His grandpa in his house of logs
Said things were going to the dogs.
His grandpa in the Flemish bogs
Said things were going to the dogs.
His grandpa in his hairy togs
Said things were going to the dogs.
But this is what I wish to state:
The dogs have had an awful wait!

There have always been disastrous fires, floods, volcanoes, earthquakes, and storms as the elemental forces of nature expand, contract, and shift in unending adjustment. Neither locally nor universally are these destructive demonstrations predictive of a dissolution of the universe. Hebrew writers commonly used symbolic language of cataclysmic natural disruptions to depict social, political, and national upheavals and changes. Jesus used such descriptions on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24; compare 2 Peter 2-3) and plainly stated that they would all be fulfilled in the generation of his listeners. Unfortunately, without discretion, present-day alarmists interpret those descriptions as literal, current, and local, fulfilling so-called "end times prophecies." Such gullibility is not a convincing testimony for Christianity.

Although Paul cautioned Timothy about the terrible times in those last days, he did not leave him to despair. He assured, "*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline*" (2 Tim. 1:7).

To the scattered disciples in the Empire, Peter encouraged, "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and strangers in the world, to abstain from the sinful desires, which war against your soul.*"

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2: 9-12).

Listen to Jesus again: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). Believers can be victorious in the worst of times. []