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I Reality

First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.”

Peter, in 2 Peter 3.3,4

INTRODUCTION

IT WAS THE EVENING of Wednesday February 18th 1981 at the end of the earth. I was living with my wife, Ann, and three of our four young children in Punta Arenas, the most southerly city on the mainland of South America, and earlier that day I had received news from England that my father had died. I'd just been asked to say a closing prayer in the Methodist chapel in Fitzroy. Fitzroy is a district of Punta Arenas named after the British admiral, Robert Fitzroy, who explored that part of the world. (He had been the captain of HMS *Beagle* on Darwin's famous voyage.) I found myself praying, "Father, we know that we need not fear anything, not even an earthquake or a fire, for whatever happens to us we are secure in your hands, and you are ordering all things in love for our good." I had never prayed such a prayer before in English, let alone in Spanish.

I wanted to return to England immediately to help my mother with arrangements for my father's funeral. This involved a visit the following afternoon to the International Police in the city centre to make arrangements for recovering my passport from Santiago. It had been there for several months while our applications for permanent residence were being processed. The local police assured me that I could collect it on my journey back to England, which meant that I could go the following day. I was about to return to our house and start packing when I realized I needed to visit a travel agent to book a flight. But after a few steps in the new direction something stopped me. For two days a phrase from the Bible had been swimming through my mind and it raised its head above the surface again: *'My times are in your hands'*. So I stood still on the pavement with traffic and people passing by me, and once more I prayed to God.

"Lord, my times are in your hands. Shall I go straight home or shall I go to the travel agent first to arrange a flight back to England?"

And somehow the Lord's answer came into my head: "Go home. Ann needs you."

I sometimes wonder how many disasters we might be saved from if we took more time to listen to God. Forty years before the terrible siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 Jesus warned his followers to flee to the hills when they saw the Roman armies approaching. Instead of that the majority of the population rushed into Jerusalem seeking refuge behind the city walls. In the ensuing siege 1,100,000 people died of starvation, and when the city finally surrendered and the soldiers entered they found only 97,000 people still alive.

A black collective taxi displaying my bus route number drove towards the bus stop where I was waiting for a bus. In those days collective taxis were large old saloon cars that sagged into the ground like punch-drunk boxers longing for a knockout to bring their fight to an end. Deciding to save time rather than money I accepted the driver's invitation to get in, and for once I was the only passenger. When you are crushed together in a back seat with two complete strangers bumping up and down in unison over potholed roads you do sometimes wonder whether you've made the right choice of transport.

"You're going to Fitzroy?" the driver asked, as though he knew the answer already.

The drivers of 'colectivos' had to keep to their designated route, and they normally drove fairly slowly because passengers, at least in those days, could flag them down anywhere, not just at bus stops. But my driver was different. Disobeying orders, he took the shortest route possible to our house, driving as though his life depended on it. He was in such a hurry that when I got out of the car at the end of our street he was off again even before I'd managed to close the door. I thought I had annoyed him by taking too long to get out. It was only when I reached our house that I learned the reason for all the haste: the open doorway was filled with smoke.

My first thought was that everyone must have got out, but I stuck my head inside and called out several times, "Is anyone there?" There was no response. I retreated into the front yard and put my bag down in what seemed to be a safe place. There were no mobile phones in those days to summon a fire brigade, and I wouldn't have known the number anyway. I cried aloud, "Help me, Jesus!", and went back into the house. I had to be sure it was empty. Already there was so much smoke I couldn't see anything. This time I heard my daughter's voice upstairs. Putting a handkerchief over my mouth I ran up the stairs and found her on the landing. I more or less carried her down. As we reached the ground floor, flames from the open-plan dining room singed her eyebrows. We made it outside to safety.

"Is anyone else in the house?" I asked.

"Nathanael is. We were playing in our bedroom. I told him to follow me."

The internal hardboard walls of the house were insulated with slabs of polystyrene, which by now was fully on fire. Whatever remained of the staircase was completely hidden from view by a curtain of oily black chemical smoke. I began climbing again and bumped into Nathanael in the pitch darkness. Our five-year-old had come nearly all the way down on his own! I tucked him under my arm like a rugby ball and turned to face the flames. I didn't know if the lowest stairs could still support us or whether they were even there any more. But in rugby there is only one way to score a try. You go for the touchline, regardless of whoever is or is not in the way. Somehow I touched down with my small son in the open air.

Ann was now shouting for help from the first-floor bedroom window. She had been fast asleep, taking a siesta after a morning of teaching at the British School. The smell of smoke had woken her up.

"What shall I do?" she called.

"Come down the stairs!"

"I can't. They are all in flames."

"Then you must jump. I'll try to catch you."

"I can't do that!"

I remembered there was a short wooden ladder in the yard. A neighbour appeared and together we lifted the ladder up to the level of the bedroom window. Ann was able to clamber down it to safety, although she did twist her ankle on the final jump. By now other neighbours had appeared on the scene.

"Where's Jonathan?" I asked the world at large.

Jonathan was our three-year-old, the only one in the family still unaccounted for. Mary, a teacher from England, also lived with us, but someone reported that she had jumped from her bedroom window and had been taken to hospital. That was good, but why had no one mentioned little Jonathan? Was he unconscious somewhere in the house? Where was he? Somebody said he might be with his 'granny' across the street. The widow, Carmen Barria, had become a dear friend to all our children, and especially to our youngest son. Perhaps he had gone over to her house for some reason. I knocked on her front door and Jonathan himself opened it, safe and sound!

By this time there was an enormous crowd of onlookers in the street. Two or three fire engines arrived, together with policemen and some marines trained in firefighting. Then some reporters and photographers turned up. Next day there was a front page report in the main local newspaper claiming that all six of the city's fire brigades had come to rescue us! The firemen who did turn up put out the fire and saved our most precious possessions, but we believe it was the Lord who rescued my family by bringing me back to the house in time.

The following day I returned to the scene of devastation and looked around the kitchen where the fire had started. The floor was black with smoke and the remains of burnt lino. All that was left of the two internal kitchen walls were charred wooden frameworks with gaping holes through them. On the outer two walls the wallpaper and part of the hardboard panelling

had burned away. Everything had burned, except for one small corner of the kitchen. At floor level two small areas of patterned wallpaper were still intact. On the smoke-blackened floor between them were two light-coloured rectangular patches where something had been standing during the blaze. Our next door neighbours told me that they had removed as much as possible from the house for safekeeping after everyone left, including Ann's small stock of jewellery, so they must also have taken whatever had stood in that one unburned corner of the ground floor. And then I remembered what it was. Two 5-litre plastic cans filled with paraffin for our paraffin stove had been standing there. Miraculously the inferno had bypassed that one small explosive corner of the house, in the very room where the fire had started. *"Not even an earthquake or a fire..."*

The house fire in 1981 totally changed the direction of our lives, and eventually many people came to believe in the God revealed by Jesus Christ as a result of it. But I'll tell you about that later.

Why did I begin this book by telling you about the fire in Fitzroy? It's because it was just one of many events in our family's life through which God has demonstrated his reality, his care, and his power to act within the world that he has created. Telling you this story will help you to understand why I believe that there is a God who speaks to us, who can warn us of events to come, and who is able to rescue us even when the world disintegrates around us.

'Generation Z' comprises people born between about 1995 and 2015. These young people are facing a future that is perhaps more uncertain than it has been for at least a century. But there is no uncertainty about the future in the mind and purposes of God. Z is the final letter of the alphabet and, as you will learn if you read on to the end, there are convincing reasons to believe that Z is the final generation who will grow to adulthood before Christ returns.

1. THE WORLD TODAY

Doom predictions through the ages

*There are signs that the world is speedily coming to an end.*¹ Whether or not these words really were inscribed on an Assyrian clay tablet around 2800 BC,² there have since been hundreds of published predictions of the imminent end of the world, or at least of this current age. Here are a few examples.

In September 1666 London was beginning to recover from the Great Plague. A bubonic plague had slaughtered some 100,000 of London's estimated 400,000 inhabitants during the preceding year. Life had almost returned to normal when the old City of London caught fire. St Paul's Cathedral and most of the buildings of the City were consumed, including 87 parish churches and 13,200 houses. Bearing in mind that the year was 1666 and that the last book of the Bible says the 'beast' who will appear at the end of this age will be characterized by the number 666, most of London's inhabitants believed that the end of the age had come and that Christ's return was imminent.

The Prophecy of the Popes was attributed to Saint Malachy in AD 1140, but was more probably written in 1590. It describes with surprising accuracy the characteristics of successive popes, with the current pope as the final one, during whose reign Rome was destined to be destroyed. Unfortunately for Malachy, Pope Francis is not called 'Peter the Roman' as he predicted.³

When I began writing this book in August 2016 someone was confidently predicting on YouTube that the USA would be destroyed by an electromagnetic pulse bomb from Russia by the end of that year. The bomb was going to disable everything electrical in the United States, even refrigerators. Consequently no one would be able to survive, unless they bought a remarkable survival kit from this gentleman for the bargain price of \$39. His sales spiel that Bible prophecies about the destruction of Babylon actually referred to the USA was surprisingly persuasive. This only goes to show how careful we have to be to balance faith and reason, and not to twist the Bible to suit our personal agendas.

In spite of the increasingly frequent prophecies about the return of Christ and the imminent end of the world, the promised dates have so far all come and gone. The Messiah hasn't yet come, neither has Armageddon, the Rapture, the antichrist, or even an invasion from Mars. So why am I adding yet another prediction about the end of the world as we know it, when history suggests that mine too will be proved wrong when the predicted date has gone by? You'll have to read on to discover the answer!

The Holy Bible

¹ The first known reference to this version of an Assyrian inscription was in 1922: *Librarian's Report, 1920-22*. Report of the State Librarian to the Governor, State of Connecticut: Public Document No. 13, p.93, State of Connecticut, Hartford, Connecticut.

² As a Christian I prefer the traditional 'BC' and 'AD' for year dates. BC stands for 'before Christ' and AD stands for 'the year of our Lord' in Latin. Whichever letters we use we still date our years from the year in which it was thought that Jesus Christ was born.

³ *The Prophecy of the Popes* describes the final pope as 'Peter the Roman', and Pope Francis does not fit that description. However at the time of his election there was an eligible African cardinal who was called Peter the Roman, and some have said that the election of Pope Francis did not comply with the laws for papal elections, because some of the cardinals were lobbied to vote for him.

The basis of any serious belief that Christ will return, and of what will happen when he does, must come from the Bible. The Bible, above all other books, is about Jesus Christ. ‘The Holy Bible’, to give it its proper title, is a remarkable compilation of history, laws, poetry, songs, prophecies, biography and teaching. Although it was written by many different hands in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek over a period of some 1500 years, it is consistent in its overall teaching from beginning to end. It is in two main parts, commonly called the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The books in the Old Testament were written before the birth of Jesus by Jewish prophets and other writers. The first five books are often called the ‘Torah’ or ‘teaching’, and include the accounts of creation, the flood, the origin of the Jewish and Arab races, the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, and the giving of the Ten Commandments and its associated laws. It also makes repeated promises about a saviour or ‘Messiah’ who was to come. Orthodox Jews and Christians (and Muslims for that matter⁴) believe that the Old Testament’s history, teaching, prophecies and songs were inspired by God and tell us the truth about our Creator. This was a belief that Jesus Christ certainly shared.⁵

The New Testament was written soon after Jesus Christ left the earth. The authors were also Jews, people who had either known Jesus personally and had travelled around with him, or who came to believe that he was the promised Messiah and saviour of the world after he had gone. The contents were selected by the early church on the basis that their authors were acknowledged to be men whom God had chosen and inspired to be his trustworthy messengers and teachers. The authors included at least two of Jesus’s original disciples and his own brother, James. The New Testament begins with four ‘Gospels’. These four short books are accounts of the life, teachings, miracles, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are followed by the story and teachings of the early believers, and finally the book of Revelation deals mainly with the events leading up to Christ’s return to set up the kingdom of God on earth.

The Qur’an, to which I shall also briefly refer, is the holy book of Islam. It was written soon after the death of the Arab leader Muhammad in AD 632. Muhammad believed that God, whom he called Allah, had given him the words via the angel Gabriel. He received and memorized the words over a period of 23 years and taught them to his followers. For Muslims the Qur’an is the foundational book of their religious faith. It always speaks positively of ‘the Torah’ and ‘the Gospel’ as being teaching revealed by Allah to Jews and Christians respectively.

Jesus promised his first disciples, *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”* (John 16.13)

You might not believe in the concept of absolute truth, preferring to define truth as whatever you choose to believe or ‘what works for you’. But the main point in this verse is that Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would tell his disciples what was going to happen in the future. I believe that if the Bible does tell us when this immediate age will end – and I do say *if* it does – then the end will almost certainly happen around AD 2030. And I’m pretty sure that I’ll get you to agree with me on that if you keep reading.

My reason for thinking that the Bible leads us to a date around AD 2030 is not based on dubious interpretations of the meanings of symbolic beasts nor on complicated codes

⁴ Because the historical passages in the Muslim Qur’an don’t agree with the corresponding passages in the Old Testament Muslims claim that the Old Testament must have been changed since God gave it. This argument is difficult to sustain historically.

⁵ In the Gospel of John, chapter 10, verse 35, Jesus (referring to a Psalm) said, *“...scripture cannot be broken.”* Referring to the Torah he said in Matthew 5.18, *“...not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished”*, and he repeatedly said that the Old Testament prophecies must be fulfilled.

assigning numbers to letters, nor even on some of the more traditional signs that the Bible associates with the end times such as wars, earthquakes, or blood-red moons. (For the record, neither volcanic eruptions, earthquakes nor deaths from warfare appear to have increased in frequency during the last 50 or 100 years. They may do so nearer Christ's return, but at present they do not provide any evidence that he is near.) My principal reason for believing that Christ's return is near is actually based on some rather simple deductions from what is plainly written in the Bible.

My plan

So here is my plan. According to the Guinness Book of Records the Holy Bible is the best selling book of all time. I hope to persuade you that it tells us, at least in outline, what is going to happen in the years immediately preceding Christ's return, and that it tells us when all this will take place.

I am not an astrologer, psychic, UFO hunter or mystic, nor am I a member of any religious cult. I am naturally rather rational and sceptical. This means that I don't readily believe what other people say unless it is supported by convincing evidence based on facts. I am accustomed to dealing with facts, having been engaged in engineering research and development for 20 years. I consider that I have a sound understanding of the Bible, having been a Bible scholar and teacher for a further 20 years. And I have university degrees in both engineering and theology.

Furthermore I am not trying to sell you anything apart from this book, and very few books make a profit for their authors. So I haven't produced an 'Armageddon Survival Kit for only US\$39', and I won't be inviting you to buy a small plot of land on the Pitcairn Islands far away from the coming nuclear war. I have written this book simply because I believe that the Lord wants me to share with you what I believe he has shown me, and to convince you of its truth. He wants you to know what's coming and to realize how important it is to be ready for it. Then you will not only survive beyond the year 2030 but will live for ever! Yes, I did say that. God has told us what is to come so that you and I will survive and live for ever, in accordance with his original intention when he made the world. If this book helps you to get on board it will make me very, very happy. And I'll be even happier if you will encourage all your friends to come on board by reading it too!

In this first main chapter I simply want to survey some world trends that suggest the age we are living in is truly and objectively distinct from any preceding age in history. Something awe-inspiringly significant is coming to a head! So let's start with the world's population.

World population

Figure 1: World population from 10,000 BC to AD 2018

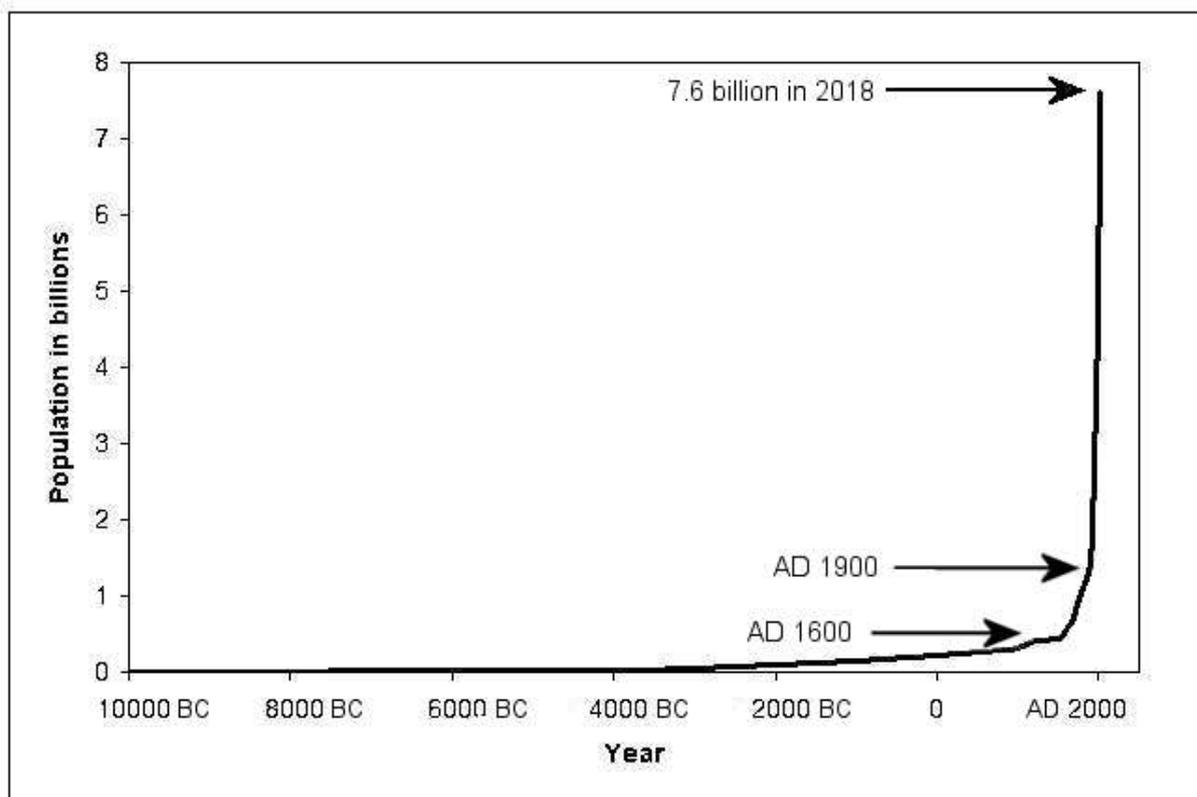


Figure 1 shows the total human population from 10,000 BC to AD 2018, according to a study published in 2016⁶, updated in 2018. Around AD 1600 it began to increase rapidly and since 1900 it has exploded. It is true that the *rate* of population growth has recently plateaued, but no one knows if that trend will continue. In any case the world's population will continue to increase at an alarming and unprecedented rate for the foreseeable future. By the time you read this it will be at least 7.7 billion. In the days of Jesus Christ it was only about 170 million.

Food security

The world's rapidly rising population inevitably raises the question, will there be enough food to feed everybody?

In general the wealthier countries produce all the food they need, although soil erosion and depleting mineral content in the soil are beginning to take a toll. The indigenous populations of these countries are not growing rapidly and some are even projected to fall, so for many of us food security does not seem to be an issue. It is in the world's poorer countries that there is cause for serious alarm.

Many of the poorest countries are already suffering from food shortages. This is partly due to corrupt government and an unjust global economy, but in general they have little scope for producing much more. Their lands are often semi-arid with little potential for irrigation, and they have limited natural resources to sell in exchange for food from other countries.

⁶ *World Population Growth*. E.Ortiz-Ospina & M.Roser, 2016, published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth/> [Online Resource] Reproduction is authorized under a CC BY-SA licence. The data come from three sources:

- (i) before 1900: History Database of the Global Environment
- (ii) 1900 to 1940: *The World at Six Billion*, a UN publication
- (iii) 1950 to 2015: *World Population Prospects: the 2015 revision*, a UN publication.

Centuries ago North Africa was the breadbasket of the Roman Empire, yet now even parts of southern Spain are turning into desert. Lake Chad in west central Africa used to supply fresh water to three west African countries, but between 1963 and 2001 its surface area decreased from approximately 25,000km² to a mere 1,350km², and it has now almost disappeared. The freshwater Aral Sea in central Asia is projected to disappear completely by 2020. Other major sources of fresh water are heading in the same direction. The World Wildlife Fund predicts that by 2025 two thirds of the world's population will be facing water shortages.

Yet it is in the poorest countries, where soil and water are vanishing, that the population is truly exploding. The population of Niger, for example, is projected by the UN to grow from 14 million in 2006 to 58 million in 2050; Yemen's population from 22 million to 54 million in the same period; and Uganda's from 30 to 91 million. Even with all the resulting added manpower, when their lands will probably have become even drier and less fertile, will they really be able to grow three times as much food as they did in 2006?

It seems likely that in the coming few years there will be either mass starvation or mass emigration. If the latter happens it will lead to increased social conflict in the receiving countries and perhaps even the erection of physical barriers to keep out hordes of hunger refugees. These things have already begun.

Rainforests

About 80% of the world's known biodiversity is found in tropical rainforests. These forests provide the only habitats for countless kinds of plants, animals and insects, irreplaceable sources of new drugs, and genetic variations that can be used in developing disease- and insect-resistant crops. And they are disappearing. It has been estimated that between 1947 and 2006 about 50% of the Earth's remaining mature tropical forests disappeared, and that unless current trends change significantly only 10% will remain in 2030.⁷ About 137 plant, animal and insect species are being lost every single day as a result of tropical rainforest deforestation, equating to 50,000 species a year.⁸

Loss of mineral resources

We depend on metals and other minerals for everything from electric power to motor vehicles and from smartphones to heart pacemakers, but some of these essential resources are being used up. Oil is the all-important mineral that powers vehicles and aeroplanes and is vital for the production of plastics, synthetic fibres and a multitude of other things. Oil supplies seem to be fairly safe for the predictable future,⁹ but metals and chemical elements known as rare earths are rapidly disappearing. The latter are essential for the manufacture of smartphones, hybrid cars, wind turbines, computers and other things. If the current demand for rare earths continues China, which produces around 90% of the world's supply, claims that its mines will run out some time between 2030 and 2035. Some say that on current estimates silver will be gone by 2035, platinum by 2030, and copper – vital for electrical wiring – by the same year. This is the inevitable consequence when finite resources have to satisfy the demands of a seemingly infinite growth in the number of people who want to use them. Perhaps that's one reason why, according to the Bible, God is going to make a new earth when this present one finally wears out.

⁷ *The Little Green Handbook: Seven Trends Shaping the Future of Our Planet*. R.Nielsen, Picador, New York, 2006.

⁸ *Rainforest Facts*. Rain-tree.com., viewed 1 October 2016.

⁹ *Why the world isn't running out of oil*. Detailed article by Brian Viner in the Daily Telegraph, 19 February 2013.