

# REVELATION REVISITED

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## Asteroid Impact - A Biblical View

Some of the predictions the tabloids feature this time of year are enough to scare the heebie-jeebies out of you:

- According to Nostradamus - or at least one interpretation of his prophecies - the antichrist will appear on Manhattan Island in 1999.
- Washington seer Jeanne Dixon predicted that World War III will break out in 1999.
- Edgar Cayce said that near the end of the current millennium the earth will shift on its axis, bringing about worldwide earthquakes, volcanoes, and tidal waves.
- Gordon Michael Scallion wrote that a Hopi Indian prophecy predicts that a new sun will enter our solar system between 1998 and 2001, bringing terrible natural disasters. Boulder, Colorado will become Atlantic beach-front property!
- Some say the Virgin Mary<sup>1</sup> predicts that during the late 1990's the earth will suffer a chastisement worse than Noah's Flood: Fire will descend from heaven, wiping out a great part of humanity.

Will natural disasters of this magnitude really happen?

If you believe the Bible, the answer is Yes. Not necessarily on the timetable the psychics give, however - but the Bible does predict that horrible natural disasters will devastate our planet prior to Jesus' return. Let's take a look at one of the more important disasters it speaks about.

### Signs in the heavens

"Immediately after the distress of those days  
the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;  
the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."<sup>2</sup>

That text is not about terrible natural disasters devastating our planet, you say.

True enough. In the past, many students of prophecy have understood Jesus' prediction of signs in the heavens to have been fulfilled by unusual events that occurred in 1780 and 1833. On May 19, 1780, the New England sky turned so dark at midday that the chickens came in to roost and people had to eat their noon meal by candlelight. One newspaper reported, "There was the appearance of midnight at noonday."<sup>3</sup>

And a dramatic shower of meteors on November 13, 1833, is still mentioned in astronomical circles as one of the greatest such events in recorded history. One observer compared it to "ripe

crabapples falling from the trees, when shaking them for cider"<sup>4</sup> - a reminder of a similar biblical description of falling stars "as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind."<sup>5</sup>

Since June 1874, when our first issue was published, *Signs of the Times* has supported the view that the dark day in 1780 and the falling of the stars in 1833 were signs announcing the nearness of Jesus' second coming. We still believe this to be true. However, a close look at everything Jesus said makes it clear that some parts of His prediction have not been fulfilled yet.

### **Anguish and perplexity**

Matthew's description of a dark day and falling stars, quoted above, is quite specific about *what* would happen, but it says nothing about the reaction of the human race to those events. Luke's account is exactly the reverse:<sup>6</sup>

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.<sup>7</sup>

By comparing Luke's account with Matthew's, we know that the "signs in the sun, moon and stars" Luke mentions were the dark day and the falling stars. Luke adds that as a result of these signs in the heavens, the "nations will be in anguish and perplexity."

*Nations* is plural, suggesting an event of international, probably worldwide, proportions. *Anguish* means "this hurts a lot," and *perplexity* means "what do we do now?" In other words, the leaders of the nations will be at a loss to know how to handle the crisis. Luke goes on to say that these events will throw the entire human race<sup>8</sup> into a panic.

You would be in anguish and perplexity if your house were to burn down. *Jesus said that's how the whole world will react to the dark day and the falling of the stars.*

The events of 1780 and 1833 were remarkable, giving believers hope in Christ's soon coming, not only at that time but for many years thereafter. However, neither event threw the governments of the world into "anguish and perplexity," and neither one caused the entire human race to panic. So the world is faced with the very real possibility that Jesus' words will be fulfilled again, and on a much greater scale.

I do want to add a word of caution, however. In our study of Bible prophecy, we must always be careful not to proclaim too positively what the future holds, because it often happens that prophecy works out differently than we, from our limited perspective, had anticipated. At the same time, we must also recognize that Jesus said that the prophecies (He was especially referring to His own) were given so that when they come to pass we can believe.<sup>9</sup>

With the caveat that I may be wrong, then, please consider with me the very real possibility that Jesus was predicting comets, asteroids, and/or meteorites impacting our globe. This interpretation of His words is particularly significant in light of what modern science knows about such events.

### **Global disaster**

During the past ten years scientists have made major strides in understanding the consequences of a comet or asteroid smashing into our plants. Much of their research has centered

around what would happen if an asteroid six miles in diameter were to intercept the earth's orbit. They have learned that such an asteroid:

would transform cool, blue Earth into a flaming crucible. When the smoke cleared, a transmuted planet would emerge: a hobbled and barren world, reeling toward some new destiny.<sup>10</sup>

According to the June 1989 issue of *National Geographic*, an asteroid six miles in diameter would create a fireball with a radius of several thousand miles. Winds of hundreds of miles an hour would sweep our planet for hours, drying trees like a giant hair dryer and burning up some 90 percent of the earth's forests!

If such an asteroid were to plunge into the ocean, it would kill off most of the world's fish. And it would create a tidal wave three miles high! The tidal wave from an impact in the Gulf of Mexico would wash over much of the North American continent. An asteroid crashing into either the Pacific or the Atlantic Ocean would inundate the United States, Mexico, and Canada as far as the major mountain ranges.

This helps us to make sense of something Jesus said about the signs in the heavens. He said the world's nations "will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea."<sup>11</sup> An asteroid impact in the ocean would indeed cause roaring and tossing of the sea, and the nations would surely be in anguish and perplexity over the consequences.

An asteroid would also create the dark day that Jesus predicted. Scientists now know that an asteroid six miles in diameter would shoot trillions of tons of pulverized rock into the upper atmosphere. Within 24 hours the jet streams would carry this dust cloud all over the world, locking the planet in total darkness for many months. Because of global crop failures, the small part of the human race - and of other life forms - that was not destroyed by the initial impact would die of starvation.

Obviously, nothing that catastrophic will happen prior to the second coming of Christ, or no one would be left alive to greet Him. However, an asteroid even a few hundred yards in size could threaten the survival of the human race. In 1989 an asteroid estimated to be 100 to 400 feet in diameter crossed earth's orbit, missing us by only a few hours. Scientists estimate that had it plunged into our planet, it would have set on fire everything within 60 miles (a 120-mile diameter). In a single instant, a city the size of New York could have been wiped out.

While this would be relatively minor compared to the devastation a six-mile-wide asteroid would cause, even a small asteroid would cast enough dust into the upper atmosphere to retard the growth of crops for several years. According to an article in *Astronomy* magazine, "Our species, if not driven to extinction, would be decimated, driving survivors to a stone-age existence."<sup>12</sup>

### **His coming near**

Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus said the signs in the sun, moon, and stars would terrorize the human race and causes the nations to be "in anguish and perplexity"? He said one other thing about the signs of His coming that we need to consider before concluding this article:

For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, *no one would survive*, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.<sup>13</sup>

Let's analyze Jesus' words. He began by saying that the time of distress immediately prior to his return will be the greatest the world has ever known, and then He said that if that time were not shortened, "no one would survive."

In other words, Jesus was predicting that the human race will face extinction. A major asteroid or comet impact could easily threaten the survival of our species - and of every other plant and animal species on our planet! No wonder Jesus said that there will be international anguish and perplexity at the signs in the heavens! No wonder He predicted that the entire human race will be in a fit of terror over the "shaking of the heavenly bodies"!

While we have no absolute proof that this is how Jesus' predictions about signs of the end will be fulfilled, at this point in earth's history it seems to me that comets, asteroids, and meteorites are the best interpretation of His words.

Time will tell.

Fortunately, however, Jesus did not end the story there. At the same time that the world as a whole is in panic over the signs in the heavens, God's people will rejoice. Jesus concluded His warnings with this advice to His disciples: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."<sup>14</sup>

What a contrast! The very same events that throw the world as a whole into a panic will cause God's people to rejoice!

We cannot say for sure whether the future will work out as I have suggested in this article. However, if it does, you will know what it means. And you can rejoice, because those events will signal that the second coming of Jesus is indeed near!

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<sup>1</sup> I am not suggesting that the alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary around the world in recent times are in the same class of phenomena as the psychics. However, some of the messages from these apparitions include predictions that are as dire as those from the psychics.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 24:29.

<sup>3</sup> *The Boston Gazette and the Country Journal*, May 29, 1780.

<sup>4</sup> "The Meteoric Shower," *The New England Magazine* 6 (January-June 1834): 47,48

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 6:13.

<sup>6</sup> Luke and Matthew were quoting from the same remarks by Jesus, but each gives us different information. By combining the two accounts, we get a much clearer picture of what Jesus actually predicted.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 21:25, 26.

<sup>8</sup> By "men," Jesus meant the entire human race, not just the males of our species.

<sup>9</sup> John 14:29.

<sup>10</sup> *Comets, Asteroids, and Meteorites* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1990), 121.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 21:25.

<sup>12</sup> *Astronomy*, September 1991, page 53.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 24:21, 22 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>14</sup> Luke 21:28.

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