

# Ecological Disaster

What does the future hold?

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# Only a century ago. . .

- Many Bible commentators thought the disasters of Biblical prophecy were unrealistic.
- So they saw:
  - Jesus' descriptions of disaster in Matthew 24 as just the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70;
  - the strange locusts in Revelation 9 as Turks;
  - the world as getting better.



# Since then . . .

- The 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought us:
  - two world wars;
  - nuclear weapons;
  - some of the worst totalitarian states in history.
- We now have a more sober view of the world situation, and are not so sure the world is getting better!



# A Choice of Catastrophes

- The title of Isaac Asimov's non-fiction book published in 1979
- He listed some 15 possible disasters
  - some certainly far in the future
  - some possibly rather soon
- He sorted them into 5 classes:
  - 1: universe becomes uninhabitable
  - 2: solar system becomes uninhabitable
  - 3: earth becomes uninhabitable
  - 4: human life is destroyed
  - 5: civilization is destroyed



# Our Talk

- Here we want to look at some disasters:
  - which are impending today, not far in the future;
  - which are being taken seriously by scientists and politicians.
- Our statistics are taken from *The World Almanac*, *Science News*, and [www.avert.org](http://www.avert.org).

# Some Potential Disasters

- Nuclear War
- Ozone Depletion
- Global Warming
- AIDS or other epidemics
- Earthquakes
- Pollution, toxins



# Nuclear War

- A serious threat from the mid-1950s to 1990, now somewhat reduced.
- There are still more than enough armaments around to have a good one.
- Don't know what all the effects would be:
  - Many killed by blast
  - Many more by fallout of radiation
  - Possibility of nuclear winter



# Nuclear War

- Since the 1990s, the biggest threat has been nuclear proliferation:
  - Over 30 countries are using nuclear power
  - A number are seeking to develop weapons
  - A real possibility of terrorist groups getting weapons or building them
  - Delivery systems are more of a hurdle, but what about trailer trucks or shipping containers?



# Ozone Depletion

- Life on earth is protected from deadly UV radiation by a layer of ozone ( $O_3$ ) in the upper atmosphere.
- This is being depleted by several chemicals produced by mankind (various oxides of nitrogen and refrigerants called CFCs).



# Ozone Depletion

- Already we are now getting a "hole" in the ozone layer in polar regions during part of the year.
- The occurrence of skin cancers has risen by nearly 100% since 1980; this may be due to increased UV radiation reaching earth's surface.



# Global Warming

- The earth's climate has long been warmed by a greenhouse effect, so that our surface temperature is about 35° F warmer than it would be without this.
- But now carbon dioxide and some other gases are accumulating from modern technology, increasing this effect.



# Global Warming

- CO<sub>2</sub> is up over 10% in 30 years, nitrous oxide is rising 2-3% per decade.
- Not sure how much effect this has had on temperatures yet, but hottest years since regular temperature records kept have been in past decade.
- If temperature trend of past 20 years continues for next 20, will have warmest weather in past 100,000 years!



# Global Warming

- Not sure exactly what effects would be, but:
  - Will probably warm the poles most;
  - Produce very dry weather in continental interiors, probably messing up agriculture;
  - Raise sea level (melting of all glacial ice would raise it about 600 ft).



# AIDS, etc.

- AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is a viral infection that crashes the human immune machinery.
- It first spread among homosexuals (perhaps coming from bestiality with monkeys), then in the IV drug community, and now into the heterosexual population.
- Though initially most of the victims were men, now about 48% are women.

# AIDS, etc.

- Since the disease was first diagnosed in 1981, more than 25 million people have died from AIDS (end of 2006).
- The situation has become disastrous in sub-Saharan Africa, where nearly 25 million people have HIV/AIDS, nearly 6% of the population.
- It is estimated that about 40 million people have the disease worldwide, and that about 3 million died in 2006.



# Earthquakes

- The biblical predictions of the end-times mention earthquakes prominently.
- Several Christian writers and speakers have claimed the number of earthquakes has increased recently.
- There is currently no evidence for more or larger earthquakes, but the damage done by them has increased due to population growth.





# Pollution, Toxins

- Both growing technology and increased terrorist activity could produce disaster here.
- Some items:
  - Modern Americans and Britons have 500-1000 times more lead in their bones than American Indians of 1000 years ago;
  - Long-term heavy alcohol use damages heart muscles in 1/3, skeletal muscles in almost 1/2.

# Pollution, Toxins

- Dioxins (some of the most powerful carcinogens known) have been spread by the paper used in milk cartons and coffee filters.
- The poisoned grape scare some years ago was definitely linked to terrorism.
- The earlier poisoned medicine scare was surely closely observed by terrorists.



# How should we respond?

- These disasters have some real similarity to those pictured in Matthew 24 and Revelation:
  - Wars
  - Famines
  - Plagues
  - Earthquakes
  - Darkness
  - Sun scorching people
- This might be the way God will bring disaster.



# How should we respond?

- But the Bible pictures even worse disaster ahead for those who continue to live as though God doesn't exist.
- Consider Jesus' parable of the fruitless fig tree in Luke 13.



# Jesus' Parable

Luke 13:6-9 (NIV) Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. 7 So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 8 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. 9 If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' "



# Ecological Disaster

A warning of the wrath to come?

