

END-DRIVEN CONCERNS

(A MATTHEW 24–25 SERIES)

PART 2

“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3)

“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately,” (vs 3)

Christ’s ominous words that the temple would be destroyed appear to have suggested to the disciples that He was referring to the eschatological judgment at the end of the world. Their heightened concern had to be delayed, however, because it was given in the hearing of a large number of people¹ – perhaps even some of the Greeks whom He had just addressed. They anxiously waited to hear more definitive statements from Jesus.²

The next scene finds Him sitting on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3), with the temple in view (Mark 13:3). It is interesting that it says the disciples came unto him “privately” (Matthew 24:3). Undoubtedly, many issues were in collision in their thinking! They wanted and needed to be alone with Him to feel free to inquire further. But Mark notes that on this occasion only four disciples (Mark 13:3) were able to make that Olivet visit.

It is uncertain as to what the disciples were fully struggling with. Christ’s ministry was coming to its end. He had predicted the passion (16:21, 17:22-23, 20:18-19). Jesus revealed that He would be the eschatological judge of humanity (7:21-23, 13:40-43, 16:27). Then the suggestion that He would be coming in power (23:39; cf. Psalm 118:26) rang in their ears. Now, suddenly, they were told that the temple was to be destroyed! The questions that follow reveal that the disciples wanted significant clarification!

Several scholars have concluded that Mark’s discourse about this event was written before 70 A.D. and Matthew’s afterwards.³ That greatly helps to clarify the distinction between the anticipated destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world settings portrayed between these two narratives. Matthew’s discourse softens the concern that the *parousia* (Second Coming) might be delayed till after 70 A.D. Though over the centuries, hope in the imminence of His return has been a key message, the anticipated signs have actually been a “delay notice.”

The destruction of the temple **was** quantifiable and heralded a distinct **end** for the Jewish people. For Matthew the *events* that Christ outlined take on a more important eschatological orientation. They have less value to Jerusalem’s apocalyptic end.

The historical **distance of time** between the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. and the yet future coming of Jesus may obscure the prophetic link between the two events. Yet, the Matthean record, associated with Luke’s details, does offer objective, sequenced information

¹ White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 628.

² *Ibid.*, p. 627.

³ Keener, Craig S.; *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 564 (cf. F. F. Bruce 1972, Brown 1979).

about “another future” – “another end.” That “distance” was detailed by Daniel. Jesus will even tell us to go there for deeper understanding. It has only been in the recent past that that instruction has been looked at closely.

“the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be?” (vs 3b)

“Tell us, Master, explain to us **when.**” Their first question relates to **time!** This is something we must also focus on.

“**When** shall these things be?” Mark and Luke also support this introductory questioning. Such timing concerns are silver threads which bind prophecy together. Similar prophecy-based questions have been asked elsewhere: Gabriel – “**How long** shall be ...?” (Daniel 8:13); Daniel – “**How long** shall it be to the end of these wonders?” (Daniel 12:6); martyrs – “**How long**, O Lord, holy and true ...?” (Revelation 6:10a).

Without a framework of **time**, prophecy could be disposed of into irrelevance. Unless it can be objectively shown to be “present truth,” these passages have limited merit. If God only says “by and by you will see the king,” it would convey disrespect and mar mankind’s hope. God is precise, objective, and provides affirming clues to make deeper Biblical study rewarding, relevant and filled with contemporary hope. The “when” **will be answered** in amazing detail!

When?

- For the destruction of Jerusalem – within one generation (Matthew 23:36 – implied; Matthew 24:34 – specific)
- For the end of the world – Daniel was to be consulted (Matthew 24:15), which would include the Hebrew portions of chapters 8–12, where many timing prophecies are given.

“what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (vs 3)

Their two-part question appears to be asked in “one breath,” again suggesting that these men could not distinguish between the destruction of the temple and the eschatological end.⁴ Their phrase “these things” ties together Christ’s eschatological coming (23:39) and the temple destruction (24:2).

Though the question suggests that a single *sign* might herald the eschatological end, we will discover that Jesus gives two answers: one defining the end of the world, and the other, the sign of His coming.

The Greek word for the noun “coming” is *parousia*. In the Hellenistic world, it referred to the arrival of a dignitary or the manifestation of a deity.⁵ Here, it is prophetically used to refer to the **second** “coming of the Son of Man.” Jesus will use it also in His answers to the disciples

⁴ Hagner, Donald A.; *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson Reference & Electronic, Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers) 33b, p. 715, vol. 33b, p. 688.

⁵ Nolland, John; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 962.

regarding His return! (verses 27, 37, 39). That later becomes a referenced link to Pauline end-time messages.⁶

Matthew had earlier allusions to the anticipated coming of Jesus using another word (*erchoma*), simply implying His appearance or arrival.

“But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come” (Matthew 10:23).

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom” (Matthew 16:27-28).

The other gospel writers do not use the word *parousia*. Since this Matthean narrative is oriented to after Jerusalem’s destruction, the answers to these questions are of major eschatologic importance to us. The end of the world will relate to the evangelization of mankind. The sign of the Second Coming will be the appearance of “clouds” – at the *parousia*.

The questions were brief and to the point. One can only imagine that the four were seated in front of Him, sharing anticipatory curiosity and anxiety. For over three years, their Master never said anything so apocalyptic. Jewish understanding included some kind of Messianic *rescue mission* and an *earthly kingdom*. Was this what Jesus was alluding to?

Reflecting on this, expositor White collectively notes: “Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples **to study out the meaning for themselves**. When He referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, His prophetic words reached beyond that event to the final conflagration in that day when the Lord shall rise out of His place to punish the world for their iniquity, when the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but **for those who should live in the last scenes** of this earth’s history.”⁷

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5).

Before He answers their queries, He warns of deceptive claims related to end-time prophecy! Warnings of the danger of being misled occur frequently in Christ’s discourses (24:11, 24; Mark 13:5-6, 22; Luke 21:8). Advanced knowledge of falsehood and deceptive teachers alerts them to how important it is to distinguish truth from error: *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”* (Matthew 24:25).

⁶ Hagner, *op. cit.*, p. 688.

⁷ White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 628.

The implication is clear. The signs and end-time events will be unmistakable (Luke 17:20-37, 21:25-28). However, the end will not be “announced” by anyone claiming to be Christ, in His name,⁸ **or** that the “time” is near **without** the associated descriptive events He is about to unfold (Luke 21:8).⁹ **They** will authenticate the eschatological end that God’s true messengers give. False messiahs were a concern to the Bible writers (II Thessalonians 2:3, I John 2:26, II John 7) in the early Christian era. Why is this of last-day concern? False teachers have already come who are deceiving many (Matthew 24:1) and leading many astray, teaching “signs” that are not part of Christ’s specific end-time prophecy (Matthew 24:24).

Discernment will be needed by Christ’s followers against these false eschatological claims. The Second Advent will be preceded with unmistakable evidence (Matthew 24:27). Jesus explicitly denied that the end time would come immediately after Jerusalem’s fall. Thus, He placed a wedge of time between those two events (Luke 21:9b).¹⁰ Most scholars conclude that the setting “assumes an interval between His departure and His return.”¹¹

Perhaps the greatest purpose of Christ’s warning comes from Paul: “*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*” (II Corinthians 11:14). Satan will appear as the Christ. The protection for God’s people must come through faith in these end-time prophecies that clearly reveal this “angel” to be an imposter!

Expositor White notes: “As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour’s advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13-15. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: ‘Christ has come! Christ has come!’ The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth. His voice is soft and subdued, yet full of melody. In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. He declares that those who persist in keeping holy the seventh day are blaspheming his name by refusing to listen to his angels sent to them with light and truth. This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion. Like the Samaritans who were deceived by Simon Magus, the multitudes, from the least to the greatest, give heed to these sorceries, saying: This is ‘the great power of God.’ Acts 8:10.”¹²

This issue is of such a magnitude that Jesus will bring it up several more times before the discourse ends. Jesus adds another caution that is important for us today:

⁸ Marshall, I. Howard, *The Gospel of Luke* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, MI – 1978), p. 763.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 766.

¹⁰ Green, Joel B.; *The Gospel of Luke* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 735.

¹¹ Bock, Darrell L.; *Luke* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), vol. 2, p. 1664.

¹² White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 624-625.

“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet” (Matthew 24:6).

“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: (vs 6)

In the next verse a list of calamities, which introduces the time of the end, includes wars. Jesus is here making a definitive statement that “wars” **by themselves** do not constitute a sign.

Jesus echoes similar “war” expressions from the Old Testament (II Chronicles 15:6, Isaiah 19:2, Jeremiah 51:46 and Daniel 11:44).¹³ His counsel tells us that we will often hear of wars and rumors of conflict. But He puts a check on their meaning!

“for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet” (vs 6)

The unique wording “these things must come to pass” reveals that God’s sovereign plan is moving forward. There is a template of prophetic events that will herald the end. War is part of the human condition – but by itself, it is not an apocalyptic sign.

Luke adds the word “first” (*proton*) to the warning about war. When the special signs occur, the *time* will be clear. These “wars” are matters of concern preceding or before the final events.¹⁴

The terror of war that the Jews experienced with Jerusalem’s fall is not eschatological. But He did reveal how to escape its ravages. No Christian lost his life. That was a horrible end to their rebellion – but was not preceded by the signs Jesus will shortly give.

He now begins to fill in the eschatological details:

“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places” (Matthew 24:7).

All civilizations throughout history have viewed major destructive events as omens from a power greater than themselves. Often they have seen them as signs of the impending end to the world. The Jewish people often saw God’s judicial wrath to their apostasy in famine (Amos 4:6-9), earthquake (4 Ezra 6:13-15, 9:3) and pestilence (4 Ezra 9:3, 13:30), often bringing some “end” to their life patterns.¹⁵ But these served as only temporary alarms to change their rebellious course.

Christ is now presenting a **unit of events** that are **collective signs** of His imminent return. Many scholars minimize the impact of their importance, citing “these have always been” (often quoting Tertullian, Apol. 40:2-3, 10, 13, 15). Many skeptical expositors even claim that all of the “natural signs” are the result of war, except perhaps earthquakes.¹⁶

However, this narrative, when reviewed with Luke’s record, is filled with critically objective data that elevates this missive! It is unique in prophetic discourses. Luke adds to this **unit** “great signs shall there be from heaven” (Luke 21:11). Contextual evidence, therefore, reveals that

¹³ Keener, *op. cit.*, p. 568.

¹⁴ Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 1666.

¹⁵ Keener, *op. cit.*, pp. 568-569.

¹⁶ Nolland, *op. cit.*, p. 963.

wars by themselves do not portend the end of the world – no matter how severe. However, when war is associated with earthquakes, famines, pestilence **and** celestial signs, they announce that the end is in sight.

Luke even emphatically notes: “**And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh**” (Luke 21:28).

When God’s people see these things **collectively commencing or beginning**, it is reason to believe Christ’s Second Coming is in sight (vs 27): “**And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.**”

Some challenge Luke’s word “**begin**” (*archomenon*). However, since in Matthew 24:8 Jesus noted that these specific events were also the “**beginning**” of sorrows, evidence suggests that these do herald the **onset** of the apocalyptic events. **These signs begin the time of the end** (cf. Luke 21:8-27).¹⁷

The conclusion by some expositors that this does not imply imminence of the end turns the stunning material Christ gave into meaninglessness. Since Christ will invite us to use Daniel to complement this message, its explicit time prophecies affirm that the end is at a defined “appointed time.” Christ does not encourage us to generalize such information. Again, Luke says that it is so important that we are to “lift up your heads” “your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28).

“All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:8).

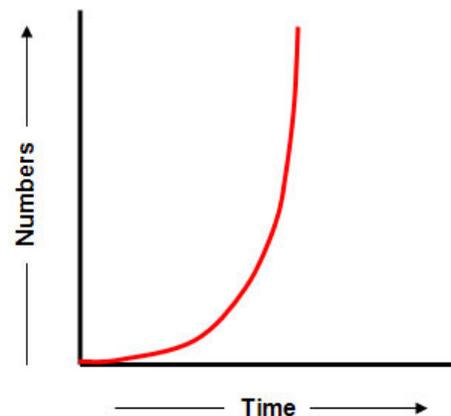
Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and celestial signs (Luke 21:11) herald the **onset** of a period of time when identifiable sorrow comes to planet earth. In verse 6 the “end is not yet.” But, here, we are told what **begins** (cf. Luke 21:28) the time of the end.

What clue might give us a signal that these collective “signs” have reached a critical mass? The next word serves as a vital signal to our end-time understanding:

“of sorrows” (vs 8)

Sorrows (*odionon*) refers to **labor pains**. The pains of a woman in labor, as a metaphor for eschatological trouble, is common in Jewish literature (Isaiah 13:8, 26:17, 66:7-8; Jeremiah 4:31, 6:24, 22:23, 30:5-6, 48:41; Hosea 13:13; Micah 4:9-10, 5:3; 1QH 3.7-10; 1 Enoch 62:4; 2 Esd. (4 Ezra) 4:42; Targum Ps. 18:14; Mark 13:8; John 16:20-22; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; Revelation 12:2; cf. Galatians 4:19, 27).¹⁸

At the “end” of the labor pains a baby arrives. This graph illustrates how labor pains follow what is called an **exponential curve**.¹⁹



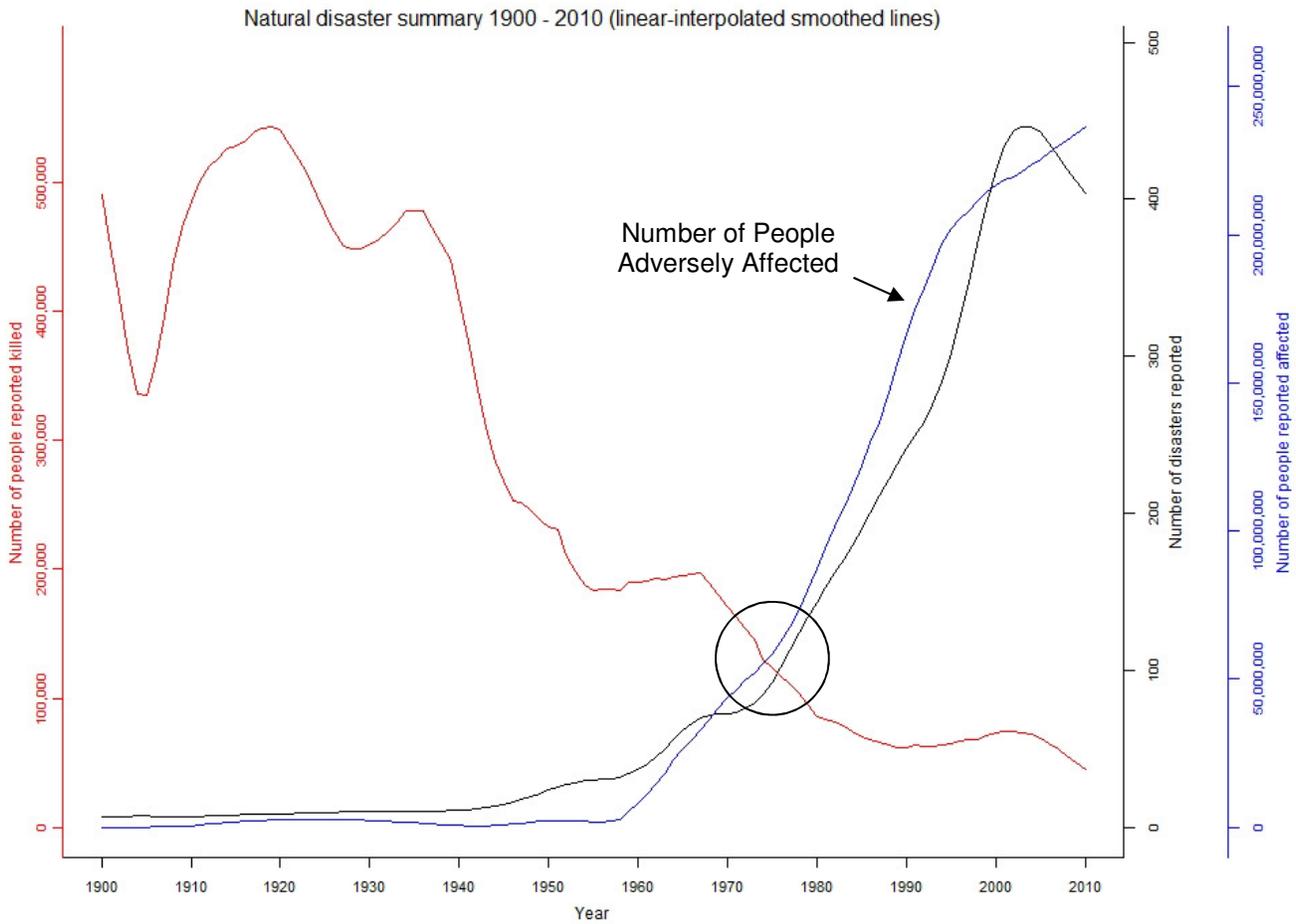
¹⁷ Marshall, *op. cit.*, 777, quoting Zahn, p. 658.

¹⁸ Turner, David L.; *Matthew* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 573.

¹⁹ http://geopolicraticus.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/exponential_growth.jpg?w=460

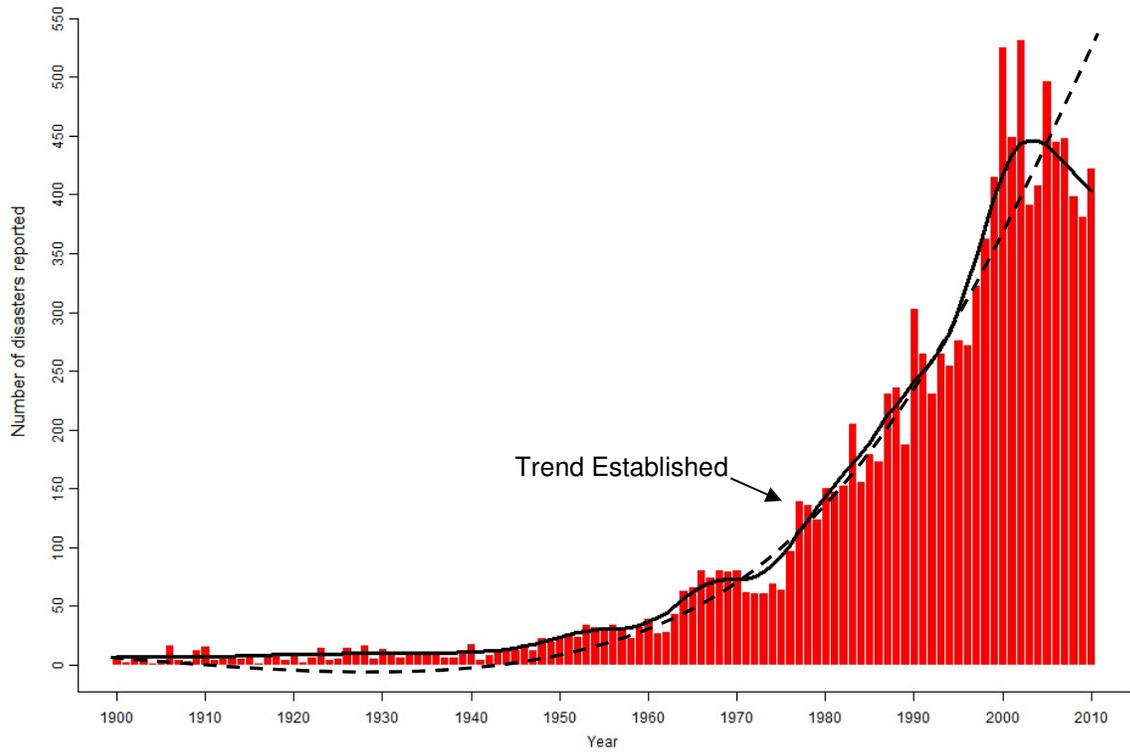
When the curve is nearly straight up, the baby comes. These signs follow that curve. When it is close to straight up, Jesus returns. From such **trends** one can mathematically ascertain **when it is significant**. Jesus said that **when** these things “begin” to come to pass, **when** we can accurately tell that a **trend pattern** has begun, **then** we have a “one generation” timing clue.

Much technical work has gone into the analysis of **natural disaster trends** by the Center for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) in Belgium since 1973. The work is housed in the School of Public Health, Catholic University of Louvain in Brussels. The data is posted at www.emdat.be. The trends that Christ collectively presented (excepting war) were established in the 1978-1980 window. Though the *number* of major disasters has recently decreased, their trend had been established. And now the *impact* of those calamities is in a significant upward trend. We are also in the upward arm of the exponential curves in the economic impact from natural disasters **and** the number of people being adversely affected by disasters. These trends are illustrated in the following graphs:



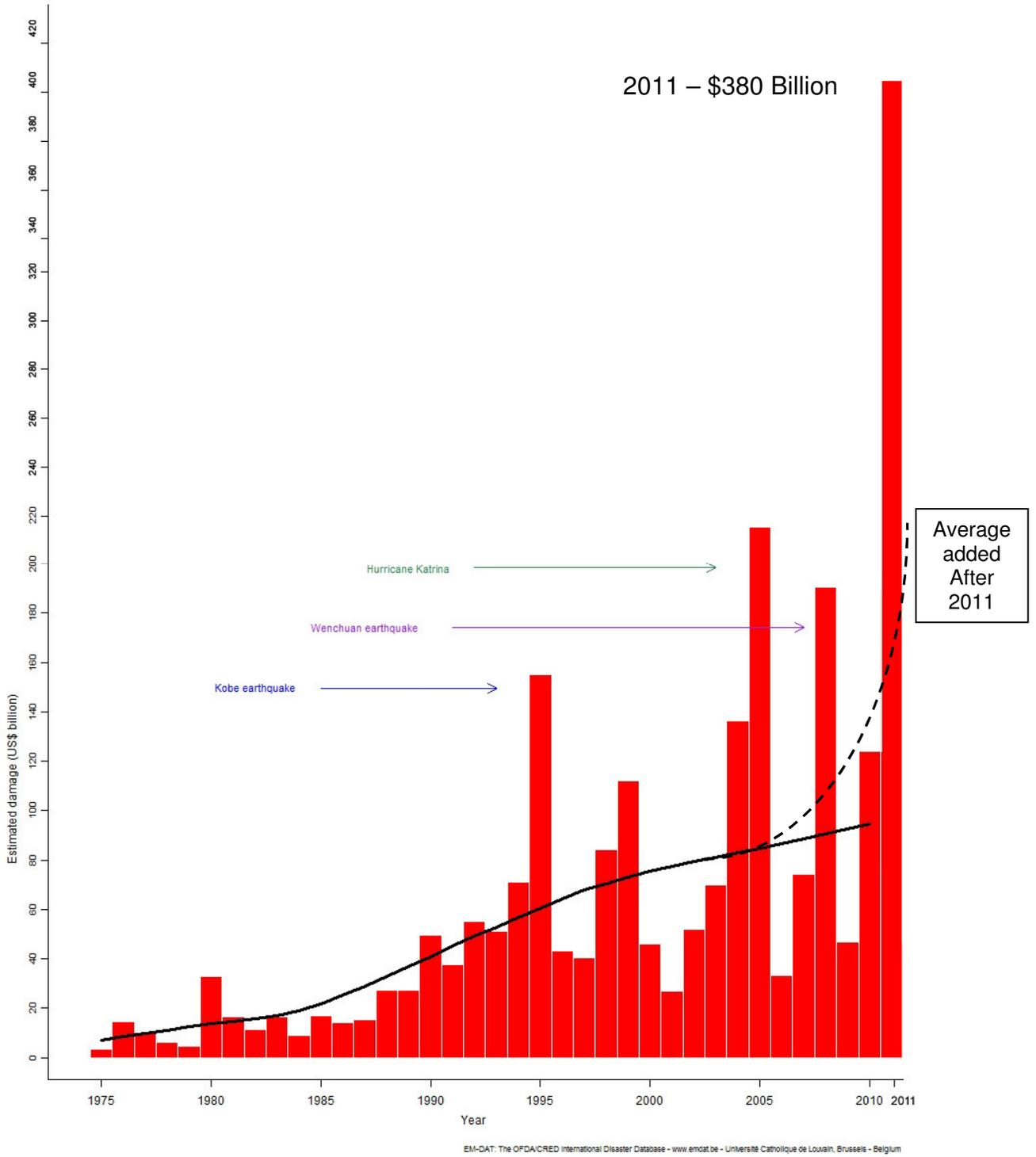
EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database - www.emdat.be - Université Catholique de Louvain, Brussels - Belgium

Natural disasters reported 1900 - 2010



EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database - www.emdat.be - Université Catholique de Louvain, Brussels - Belgium

Global Cost of Natural Disasters



When “these things” **begin** collectively and statistically trending upward as a lady in labor, a transition in the time of the end has occurred. This refers to the “whole package” of events which begins with the calamities and includes even the wars – all combined.^{20,21}

These **trends** are acting as a signal – a sign – a notice – that the unfolding of apocalyptic prophecy has been initiated. There is grave danger that students of end-time narratives generalize messages to the point of minimization – making them of *no effect*. Prophecy is loaded with details like these:

2300-year prophecy was uniquely given to announce when God **begins** to make up His kingdom (Malachi 3:17) (from Daniel 8:14)

1929 is a year derived from Revelation 17, when a church/state **coalition begins** that will lead to global power, immediately preceding the *parousia* (Revelation 16:19, 17:1).

1978–1980 is when these natural disaster trends were established. All apocalyptic prophesy is to be completed within a generation of that onset (40 years).

Significant **other** timing prophecies are within Daniel and Revelation, especially a terminal three-and-a-half-year period, ending in deliverance of God’s people. We have now entered a period when there are apocalyptic clocks ticking. These issues are no longer subjective.

Why is all of this significant? Jesus said regarding the fall of Jerusalem and His Second Coming: “*Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled*” (Matthew 24:34; cf. Luke 21:32).

This prophecy was given in 30–31 A.D. Desolation came to Jerusalem and the Hebrew people in 70 A.D. What appears to be the beginning of the eschatological signs Jesus gave? Objective trends that will end within one generation (see Appendix 1 – One Generation).

Though the term “generation” has several Biblical meanings, its use here is the time span of a single human generation qualified by the fall of Jerusalem.²² “***The generation that sees the beginning of the end, will also experience its end.***”²³ Thus, these signs are now a driving message that ***we have entered*** this “***when***” time issue.

(to be continued)

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²⁰ Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 1656.

²¹ Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 777.

²² Nolland, *op. cit.*, p. 989.

²³ Bock, *op. cit.*, p. 1691.