A Review of Some Catastrophic Events in History and Their Impact on Society: A Prelude to the Second Advent of Jesus

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Abstract

Our planet earth has witnessed many catastrophic events from time immemorial. These calamites are unrelenting. Volcanic eruptions, floods, earthquakes and wars are on the increase. Scriptures mention that Jesus indicated that these unfortunate events will be on the increase just before He returns (Matt. 24:3-8). The twentieth century hosted the bloodiest of all the wars in recorded history. The first and second world wars recorded millions of casualties both civilian and military. Six million Jews were massacred by facist Germany. The upsurge in climate change and the attendant flooding across the world is an attestation to a gloomy future. The article will look at some of the challenges faced by the aviation sector. The driving force behind the unyielding tempest of violence among the nations will be examined. Referencing from the Scriptures, especially Matthew 24, this paper sees the speedy fulfillment of signs stated by Jesus as pointers to His second advent.There are other scriptural references which indicate that there are forces inflcting humanity with destructive impulses Eph. (6:12). These impulses cannot be checked due to the fact that evil forces in the spiritual realm are more advanced in technology. The article sees the second Advent of Jesus as the only solution to the calamities.

Key Words: Mount Vesuvius, Aviation Disasters, Earthquakes, World Wars and oil-pipeline explosions

Introduction

In August AD 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted in volcanic explosions (Glacomeli 2023), the cities of Herculaneum, Pompeii and Stabiae were devastated by the resultant rain of lava and ash (ibid) Thousands lost their lives.

For more than 16 years, Mount Vesuvius had been groaning. Many citizens of Rome, non-indigenes and slaves, did not pay attention to the warnings. Engrossed in a life of loose-living, they were swallowed up in the inferno. The incident was recorded by an eye-witness, Pliny the Younger (Wasson 2023).

Pliny the Younger's real Latin name was Gaius Publius Caecillius Secundus (Denova 2021). He was a nephew to Pliny the Elder. Pliny the Younger, besides serving as a military tribune in Syria, was a literary scholar. He was born in AD 61 and died in 112 (ibid). ,

At the request of Tacitus (Petrarco 2020), that Pliny the Younger inform him of the devastating impact of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on the surrounding cities, he responded by documenting some of the information on the incident available. Below is an excerpt from his account:

> My uncle was stationed at Misenum, in active command of the fleet. On 24 August, in the early afternoon, my mother drew his attention to a cloud of unusual size and appearance. He had been out in the sun, had taken a cold bath, and lunched while lying down, and was then working on his books. He called for his shoes and climbed up to a place which would give him the best view of the phenomenon. It was not clear at that distance from which mountain the cloud was rising (it was afterwards known to be Vesuvius); its general appearance can best be expressed as being like an umbrella pane, for it rose to a great height on a sort of trunk and then split off to branches; I imagine because it was thrust upwards by the first blast and left unsupported as the pressure subsided, or else it was borne down by its own weight so that it spread out and gradually dispersed. Sometimes it looked white, sometimes blotched and

> dirty, according to the amount of sod and ashes it carried with it. My uncle's scholarly acumen saw at once that it was important enough for a closer inspection and he ordered a boat to be made ready, telling me I could come with him if wished.
> I replied that I preferred to go on with my studies, and as it happened he had himself given me some writing to do. **(Source:** The Letters of Pliny the Younger, translated by Radice, Botty, Penguine Books).

As Pliny the Elder was about to set sail, he received a letter from Rectina, wife of Tascius, imploring him to rescue her from the explosions. Her house was located at the foot of the mountain. The only safe route available to her was through the sea and that by boat.
Pliny the Younger, reported that his uncle perished in the inferno. The rescue mission was not successful: "He changed his plans, and what he had begun in a spirit of inquiry he completed as a hero. He gave orders for the warships to be launched and went aboard himself with the intention of bringing help to many more people besides Rectina, for this lovely stretch of coast was thickly populated" (Vance 1987:13).

Mount Vesuvius is located in southern Italy close to the shore of the Bay of Naples and the city of Naples. The mountain is about 4,190 ft. (1,277 m) high. The slopes were covered with beautiful orchards and vineyards. There were lush gardens and the rich found a lot of comfort in the beautiful valleys and slopes of Vesuvius.

It was business as usual, on August 23, AD 79. Like Sodom and Gomorrha, little did the thousands of the morally bankrupt occupants of the city know that the end had come. August 24 came with the same promises of life at its best - the sea breeze, the foods, the women, the men and the wine. But, suddenly, it happened. Pompeii lost its glory and died. The ruins of Pompeii lay beneath ash and mud for centuries until archeologists started digging up the once great city of the Roman Empire.

There is no record of Christians dying from the volcanic eruptions of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. Drusilla, the former wife of Azizus, king of Edessa, died in the

inferno (Neufeld 1976:296). Edessa was a city in south-eastern Turkey presently known as Sanliurfa. It is about 430 miles from Jerusalem. She eloped with Felix who, at the time, was the Roman procurator of Judea with its capital at Caesarea: **Acts 23:23-24.** Paul, the apostle, was brought before Felix at Caesarea. He had the opportunity of ministering to him and Drusilla, emphasizing on "faith in Christ" and "self control and the coming judgment". "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ." **Acts 24:24,25.** The Scripture records that "Felix was alarmed".

Drusilla was one of the children bom to Herod Agrippa I, whose acts of wickedness are recorded in Acts 12. She was given in marriage to Azizus, king of Edessa (Sanliurfa) before she deserted him in preference for Claudius Felix. Felix died a terrible death, while Drusilla perished in the volcanic ash spewed out by Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 (Ibid).

Aviation Disasters

Wilbur and Orville Wright were the first humans in history to manufacture and fly aeroplanes (Crouch 2024). Some of the techniques still in use in aviation industry, in modem times, were developed by these brothers. Inspired by the work of German-born "aeronautical pioneer, Otto Lilienthal" (Jakab 2012), who died in 1896 in a glider accident, they developed and flew a 17 ft. wingspan flight in 1900. The aircraft carried Wilbur off the ground for some seconds.

The invention of aeroplanes has, to a great extent, assisted to reduce the effect of the distances between continents. Presently, flying remains the fastest means of travel on the planet. Between 1900 and 2007, human mind had created different types of aeroplane. Hundreds of commercial flights zoom across the sky virtually every minute carrying thousands of travelers around the globe.

As the aeroplanes become more comfo[8]rtable and bigger, so the weight of the disaster for those involved in accidents. On the 19th of August, 1980, at Riyadh airport, Lockheed Tristar, Saudi, caught fire killing 301 persons on board (Thompson: New insights). On the 27th March, 1997, at Tenerife, Spain, Pan AM

and KLM flights collided, killing 583 passengers and crews (Ziomek 2020). The sad events continue.

Nigeria has witnessed a series of aeroplane disasters. In September 1992, 158 people perished in a military plane which crashed into a marshy area near Lagos. In November 1996 ADC airline, Boeing 727, crashed into a lagoon close to Lagos (Udo: Flight ADK 086). Nigeria lost 142 people in that incident. EAS Airlines crashed in May 2002 in Kano, killing 148 persons. In 2007, Sosoliso Airline crashed on landing at Port Harcourt airport killing all on board. Many high school students on holiday from Loyola College at Abuja were involved in the unfortunate incident (Ugwejeh: PH Plane Crash).

Earthquakes

Jesus predicted there will be earthquakes in different places of the earth **Mark 13:8.** It is one of the events that indicate the nearness of His second advent. Paul mentions that the entire creation is groaning **Rom. 8:22;** that was two thousand years ago. What would be Paul's response to events if he had existed in the twenty-first century? Creation is not just vibrating but has entered an irreversible era of destruction and decay that can only be terminated by the second appearing of Jesus Christ. It is only then that creation will be set free from its "bondage to decay" **Rom. 8:21.**

Earthquake is a shaking or trembling of the earth caused by underground volcanic or tectonic activities. Since the days of Noah, earthquakes have been in existence. The antediluvians (those who lived before Noah's flood) experienced an unbelievable upheaval of nature that emptied waters from the sky while the fountains of the great deep exploded submerging the entire globe. Ellen G. White describes the event as stated:

> For seven days after Noah and his family entered the ark, there appeared no sign of the coming storm... But upon the eight day dark clouds overspread the heavens.
> There followed the muttering of thunder and the flash of lightening. Soon large drops of rain began to fall. The world had never witnessed anything like this, and the hearts of men were

> struck with fear... Water appeared to come from the clouds in mighty cataracts. Rivers broke away from their boundaries, overflowed the valleys. Jets of water burst from the earth with indescribable force, throwing massive rocks hundreds of feet into the air, and these, in falling, buried themselves deep in the ground (Patriarchs and Prophets 99-100)

Jesus' prediction that there would be earthquakes in different places before His second advent, must be in reference to their frequency.

Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was one of the greatest in history. It had a radius close to 700 miles and vibrated the waters of lakes and seas within the distance of well over 2,000 miles. Over 40,000 persons died and half of the city of Lisbon was razed (Miene 1953:217). The shockwave was felt in many parts of Europe, North Africa, America, Greenland and the West Indies. Four million square miles of the earth's surface was affected (ibid). At Lisbon, an underground explosion later followed by a violent shock devastated a large part of the city. About 60,000 persons died that instant (White 1988, Great Controversy:305). Parents, children, families disappeared. Was it because they were the worst of sinners? No. Calamities of such magnitude proclaim, in very clear terms, that this world does not have much to offer. Blessed are those who utilize the opportunity given to them in this world as a springboard for the world to come.

On December 26, 2004, the world was brought to a standstill at the report of the tsunami disaster in Indonesia. The magnitude of the earthquake that engineered this catastrophe was 9.0. It started from the northwestern coast of Sumatra. Fourteen countries were affected including the east coast of Africa. That tsunami was the most devastating to be recorded in history (Waldman 2004). The International Committee of the Red Cross projected about 250,000 deaths. Indonesia, closest to the epicentre of the calamity suffered most in terms of human life and damage to infrastructure. Tangshan earthquake was ascribed the deadliest in the 20th century history. Exactly 3.42 a.m. on the 28th of July, 1976.

Tangshan, a city in northeastern China, was hit by an earthquake, the magnitude of 7.8. About 240,000 people were killed (Paltemaa: Tangshan earthquake 1976).

Records have it that the 3.42 a.m. shock trapped about 80% of the victims under rubbles. Unfortunately an aftershock of 7.1 magnitude in the afternoon of the same day caused the death of so many thousands that were on the verge of being rescued (Chen: Aftershocks). These events keep reminding us of how unpredictable this world is. Some creatures in Tangshan before the earthquake hit gave warnings which, of course, were not heeded by human beings. Chickens and fish were very sensitive to the imminent danger. Given their freedom, they would have fled to safety (Rosenberg 2019).

The frequency of earthquakes in the 21st century is a clear sign that the earth is no longer quaking but vibrating. Could our planet have become sensitive to the close of probation and return of Jesus? Are we going to be caught sleeping like the residents of Tangshan in 1976? Paul advises us not to be caught sleeping (1Thess. 5:4,5). Something big and final is about to happen to this groaning planet and that, probably, sooner than we are trying to figure out. Jesus is about to return.

Wars

The First World War started in August 1914 and ended in November 1918. About 32 countries were involved in the conflict. More than ten million people perished and well over 20 million injured (Robin 2000). The infrastructural destruction, deaths on the battle field and the financial crises generated by the war devastated the countries of Europe and their allies. Twenty-one years of peace (1918 — 1939) ended with resurgence of war - this time it was the second world war. It started in 1939 with the Anglo-French coalition fighting against Germany. By the end of the war in 1945, most of the leading nations of the world had joined forces with either side.

World War II remains the bloodiest war in world history. Ferguson observes that the years between 1900 and 1999 were "the bloodiest" in modem times (2006:xxxiv). The number of lives lost in these twentieth century wars is insignificant when compared to the blood-bath experience of the two world wars. It is estimated that in World War II alone, "between 70 and 80 million" people died. (O'Neill 2024).

Within the past century (twentieth century) some nations were engaged in wars that took the lives of more than one million people. The table below portrays some of the wars and the period they occurred in the 20th century. (Fergusen xxxiv).

S/N	**WAR**	**PERIOD**
1.	The Mexican Revolutionary War	1910- 20
2.	The Russian Civil War	1917-21
3.	The Civil War in China	1926- 37
4.	The Korean War	1950- 53
5.	The Intermittent Civil Wars in Rwanda & Burundi	1963 -95
6.	The Post-colonial Wars in Indo-China	1960-75
7.	The Ethiopian Civil War	1962-92
8.	The Nigerian Civil War	1966-70
9.	The Bangladeshi War of Independence	1971
10.	The Civil War in Mozambique	1975-93
11.	The War in Afghanistan	1979-2001
12.	The Iran-Iraq War	1980-88
13.	The ongoing civil war in Sudan	1983 -2005
14.	The ongoing civil war in Congo	1988 -

Source: Niall Ferguson. War of the World. Penguin Books. (2006)

The magnitude of blood shed, both military and civilians during the wars of the twentieth century is an attestation to the Biblical fact that creation is groaning (**Rom. 8:22).** It is catastrophic.. Among the millions slaughtered by Nazi Germany during the Second World War were about six million Jews (Blackmore 2023).

Those victims of Nazi genocide were captured from among the countries that Hitler had earlier overrun. Whole families were wiped out. Many died in gas chambers; some others were starved to death (Ibid).

In 1906, Ellen White spoke of impending destruction of lives encouraged by rebellion against the laws of God. Calamities would come because of the moral

bankruptcy of the human race. She puts it this way (*Evangelism* 27)

> Calamities will come - calamities most awful, most unexpected; and these destructions will follow one after another. If there will be a heeding of the warnings that God has given, and if churches will repent, returning to their allegiance, then other cities may be spared for a time. But if men who have been deceived continue in the same way in which they have been walking, disregarding the law of God and presenting falsehoods before the people, God allows them to suffer calamity, that their senses may be awakened...

This statement was made eight years before the beginning of the first World War in 1914. Pride, political and economic interest led nations into the brutal wars of the twentieth century. Since then, calamities have not reduced. On September 11, 2001, the world was awakened to the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre at New York by terrorists. The scar left in the minds of many in America and the world, is still fresh.

Storms, Floods, Fires and Oil Spillage

Storms are identified as the "disturbance of the atmosphere" (Merriam-Webster 283), characterized by violent winds and most times accompanied by heavy rains. There are different types of storms: cyclone, hurricanes and tornadoes. Cyclones rotate or move in wheel-like forms that have a centre. They travel at the speed of 20 to 30 miles an hour (Websters, 283), when a storm exceeds the speed of 74 miles an hour, it turns into a hurricane.

Miami Florida suffered from a hurricane called Hurricane Andrew in 1992. It was the costliest natural disaster in United States history until Hurricane Katrina, which flooded New Orleans, Louisiana, emerged in 2005. Hurricane Andrew caused damages worth $27 billion, (Rafferty, editor nd). while Katrina destroyed ecology and property estimated at $125 billion (Rudden 2023). It is recorded as the "costliest natural disaster as well as one of the five deadliest" in the US (Wulfeck: Top 5 Hurricanes).

Many a time, violent storms are accompanied by floods. Hurricane Katrina was an outstanding example. New Orleans was flooded and thousands of the city dwellers sought refuge in neighbouring cities.

The Ogunpa river of Ibadan in Nigeria periodically overflows its banks wreaking havoc to the city dwellers whose homes are located around its bank. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is constantly plagued by flooding. Besides crude oil spillage and malaria, flooding is a perennial problem of the delta dwellers.

Outbreak of fires is also a global crisis. On August 20, 1988, United States witnessed one of the worst fire outbreaks in its history. Yellow Stone National Park and the surrounding area, for miles, were engulfed in wild fire encouraged by favourable winds. It took well over 9,000 men and trained fire fighters to bring the fire under control (McClure: Yellowstone fires 1988).

In Philippines, 4,341 people died in a crowded passenger ferry that collided with an oil tanker near the island of Mindoro on the 20th of December, 1987. Few survived the inferno that resulted from the collision (Guzman: Hell at Sea).

Between 1998 and 2000 in Nigeria, an oil pipeline explosion claimed nearly 1,000 lives in the villages of Jesse, Oviri and Adeje (Johnson 2022:636-657). Driven by poverty, villagers were attracted to a leakage from an oil pipeline at the outskirts of the town. Both young and old were involved in the "bunkering". *Bunkering* is a term used to express the illegal lifting of petroleum product. Scarcity of fuel in the country 1999, made the business juicy. A 20-litre jerry can- full of fuel costs N3,000 in the year 2000. Unfortunately the pipe caught fire and exploded. Hundreds of people were burnt to death, and many beyond recognition. Skeletons of babies clinging to their mothers' back were found. It was an incident that shook the entire nation of Nigeria.

The ugly incident did not deter would-be victims from trying to make an attempt at earning quick money. In November 2000 at Ebute Eko near Lagos, at about 6.30 p.m., a similar explosion killed 60 people (Anaroke 2000:3).

Very often sufferings and pains are generated by the victims. The demonic forces know the weakness inherent in man. They carefully study every human being and device programmes that tend to entice unguarded human senses.

They are smarter than any human born into this world since the days of Adam. Scriptures insist that those who defeat them, do so through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Paul makes it clear when he says:

> *Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* ***Eph. 6:10-12.***

Paul talks about wrestling against "cosmic powers". Cosmic powers are not under chain and lock of gravity. Physical laws are at their disposal. They are far more advanced in knowledge and technology than human beings. They are not made of flesh, blood and bones. And, yet, humans wrestle against them. We do not find their superiority comfortable. There must be something in human beings that propels us to war against these negative cosmic forces. God Himself ordained that human beings remain in "enmity" with evil forces. The book of Genesis declares it thus:

> I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (3:15).

Conclusion

Calamities have existed and persisted since the dawn of recorded history. Since the twentieth century violence has been on the increase. In the gospel of Matthew 24 Jesus specifically identified the last days of earth's history as a period of unimaginable crises. This article has reviewed some of these challenges as witnessed in the past and today's world. Based on the word of God, as clearly

stated in the scriptures, the second advent of Jesus is very close. "In such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man cometh" (Mt 24:44) .

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