

Dystopia? Utopia?

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There has been a trend over the last few decades in fiction, particularly in science fiction—that is where these types of stories tend to be put—as well as in television and movies, toward what is called dystopian themes. Examples of older books that you might be familiar with, maybe having read them in school, would be *Brave New World* by Aldus Huxley which was out in 1931. Then there was *1984* by George Orwell, which came out in 1949. *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, which came out in 1953. And then there are newer books that some of the younger people might be familiar with, such as *The Giver* which came out only a few years ago; and, of course, the very popular recent book and movie, *The Hunger Games*. And even this year's new TV season has a show titled, *Revolution*, which is also dystopian, about what happens when the lights go out.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “dystopia” as, “An imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad; typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one.”

Wikipedia offers, “A dystopia is the idea of a society generally of a speculative future, characterized by negative and anti-utopian elements varying from environmental, or political / social issues.”

Simply put, a dystopia is a bad future place.

The word itself is derived from the Greek, “dys,” which means bad or hard; difficult. And “topia,” which is a place or landscape. Topiaries has its root in “topia.” It is just a place or landscape.

The same idea could be derived from the Greek “kakotopia,” which does not sound as good as dystopia, so we use the latter one. This “kako” or “kakos” means evil. And so, kakotopia would be an evil place.

On the other hand, sometimes it is good to define things by their opposites. The word “utopia” was coined by one Thomas Moore, in 1516, as the title of a book he wrote by that name, describing an island republic at its optimal state. And thus, “utopia” came to describe an ideal or perfect society with an implication of the future, but also an implication of impracticality and impossibility. Nobody thinks that society could actually be this way.

To many writers and thinkers, society is more likely to descend into dystopia, rather than to ascend into utopia.

In literature a dystopia is a society in a repressive and controlled state. It is often under the guise of being utopian. The people who are in charge think they are managing a utopian society where the people under their boot know for sure that they are in a dystopia, because they have no freedom and are suffering from a great deal of want.

So, it is utopian only for the select few in control.

Dystopian societies feature different kinds of repressive control systems, normally. These would be things like a lot of surveillance, whether from cameras, or police presence; there are always curfews not allowing the people out after a certain hour; strictly patrolled boundaries. And, they even go so far as to do things like controlling marriage and procreation.

There is also a great deal of active and passive coercion of the people. For instance, they make them live regimented lifestyles—everybody has to do the same thing. These lifestyles are controlled by various rewards and promotions for cooperation; giving food bonuses, housing upgrades, or something of this sort to make them comply.

On the other hand, if they are of a rebellious nature, they will use shaming, demotion, hard labor, imprisonment, torture, and even death to control the society.

So, we can see that dystopias lack freedom; tend to lack general prosperity, although the people at the top of the ladder tend to be quite well off; and they tend to lack peace. They might have a veneer of peace, but underneath there is a roiling discontent, which is about to break out at any time.

Now a recent example of dystopian literature that many of us have heard about, or have read recently, is *The Hunger Games*. I have read it. I have seen the movie. It is enlightening in terms of what I am going to share with you today.

The Hunger Games is set in a future North America, in an area called Panem. On first glance you might think of “all” as the Latin word for all is “pan.” Actually, it derives from another Latin word which is very similar, which means “bread.” So the country is called bread country.

Panem has suffered an unspecified apocalyptic event. The author never tells us exactly what it was. But, we do know that Washington D.C., which is in the forbidden district 13, has been nuked in some previous rebellion. The capitol has been moved to somewhere in the Rocky Mountains near Denver, and they have decreed that as a yearly reminder to the people of the Capitol’s power, that each of the twelve districts must give in tribute a teen boy, and a teen girl to fight to the death in a televised event called The Hunger Games. The heroine of the story is a young lady named Katniss Everdine, who gets involved in this because her sister, who is only 13, has had her name drawn; and she does not want her sister, who is so young, to be the first to go in the games, not wanting her to die. So, Katniss takes her place.

Putting the plot aside for a moment, Panem is a totalitarian state. Only the wealthy and the politically connected who live in the capitol have any freedom and prosperity at all. Most people are like those depicted in district 12, where Katniss is, in the Appalachian area, who live hand-to-mouth while trying to meet government quotas for whatever it is they produce or manufacture; in district 12, it is coal. Naturally, the Appalachians have been the center of coal production for the United States for quite some time.

But, not only are they living hand-to-mouth, the police are everywhere. The fences around them are electrified, or are supposed to be, but they have found a way through there, get out, and hunt in the wilds.

Resistance to the capitol is ruthlessly crushed. All media that they receive is state controlled propaganda. Technology is mostly confined to the capitol and their citizens there. Travel and communication between districts is

severely restricted. Consumer goods are rare; money is basically non-existent; barter is common; and a thriving black market exists. The times are very severe.

Now, Suzanne Collins, the book's author, uses the story to project a possible future based on today's trends. That is why she calls the name of the country, Panem, because she sees increasing government control on the one hand, and the hoi-poi—the common man—willing to be appeased with bread and circuses. So you have Panem—the bread—and then you have the hunger games—the circus. This is the central theme of the whole trilogy that she presents in *The Hunger Games*, and her next two books—that the people are being oppressed through bread and circuses. They are being appeased and therefore the government maintains control.

So, in today's terms, we could say that Suzanne Collins looks at what is going on, and she sees people being appeased by food stamps and reality shows. And, they are not willing to pull back the curtains on what is going on and see what is really happening.

They are just happy to have food, and to be entertained.

So, she sees a society willing to give up freedom and opportunity in exchange for security and entertainment. They will give up responsibility to be taken care of by “big brother,” which harkens back to 1984 mentioned above. And in her view, the future looks bleak, repressive, and brutal. It is a dystopia. She sees a dystopian future for all of us.

Okay—how do we, as members of God's church who had the plan of God revealed to them through the holy days, picture the future? Do we see things like Suzanne Collins does, as dystopia? Or, do we see utopia? Do we imagine war, weariness, and want? Or do we see peace, power, and prosperity in our futures? So, is it dystopia? Or utopia?

Now, this is actually a trick question. And it is a trick question because for those who live to witness the return of Christ both dystopia, and utopia lie in the future. We do not get a choice.

Before God's Kingdom comes the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. So, the way to utopia is through dystopia. Before the day dawns, we must pass through the dark of night.

It has fallen to me to be the one to do the sermon that explains the holy day and how it fits in the plan of God.

Deuteronomy 16:13-15 "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.

Now, this is a shortened version, and a slightly different version, of God's command to Israel to keep the Feast of Tabernacles after the fall harvest. It is all very plain, there. This feast happens after you gather in from your fields and from the winepresses. And so, it is a fall harvest festival.

If we were to go back and read in the Leviticus 23:33-43, which we will not do this year, we would see other details. This is the main area of the Bible where all the festivals are mentioned, and a lot of the basic details are mentioned there. So we know that it starts on the 15th day of this seventh month, and various other things like the first and eighth days are holy convocations on which we are to do no customary work—our normal work we might do. And, we are to dwell in booths, which is some sort of temporary dwelling, to remember that God made Israel to dwell in tents in the wilderness; that they were on the move; that they were going from one place to another; that they had to rely on Him for so many of the things that they had.

So this reiteration in Deuteronomy 16 of this command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles emphasizes rejoicing. It is one of the main things that it says in verse 14, “You shall rejoice in your feast,” and then at the end of verse 15, “In all the work of your hands so that you shall surely rejoice.” So, God is emphasizing that this is a time of great joy. There is a lot to be happy about, because you have just pulled in the harvest. Hopefully, you have been following God’s way, and He has blessed us bountifully with the things that we need, so we have more at that point of the year than we would have at any time.

Deuteronomy 16 emphasizes rejoicing because of God’s manifold blessings. And, we are supposed to take the time during this feast to think about all the blessings of the year that He has bestowed upon us. There is no way to number them like the old *Count Your Blessings, One by One*; it is impossible to do, because when you start really thinking about it, you find out that everything is a blessing from God—everything that is good, I should say; a lot of the “bad” things end up being blessings from God, but we just do not understand it.

They just mount up and mount up when we start to list the things that God does for us.

Please turn to Deuteronomy 14. Here, we will pick up a little bit on why we should be rejoicing. This passage is a section on tithing, mostly the second tithe.

Deuteronomy 14:22-27 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that

money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. You shall not forsake the Levite who is within your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.

Now, here we see a great reason why we can rejoice. We have our second tithe. It is about a tenth of our yearly income in hand to spend in just over one week. Now, I know that in these days that tithe may not be as big as it once was. You may have had trouble finding work, or you may have been out of work for a while. But, we still have money at this time, more than we normally would have to spend an 8 day period.

Normally, we have to put that money aside for bills and things, but here at the feast we have a little bit more money to spend. And this should be a vivid reminder of God's blessing, because God wants us to have a fine time at the Feast of Tabernacles. He wants us to spend the 8 days of our feast in joy. And happy fellowship with our brethren eating and drinking the finer things of life. That is mostly what He talks about there—buying oxen or sheep.

We do not normally do that here, but we do go out for a fine steak or leg of lamb at a nice restaurant, and God says, “Go ahead! This is why I have given you the money to do that. You want a nice bottle of wine? Get one a bit better than you would normally buy at home. Do you like strong liquor? Well, do not drink too much of it, but if you like a single malt scotch, and you able to handle it? Fine, do that.” God wants you to rejoice, and to be able to sample what it is to live a little bit higher than you normally do.

But, He also says that we are to learn to fear Him. This is what He says first. “Yes, you are going to have these things because you have tithed.” But He gives the tithe and tells us to go to this feast so that we can learn to fear Him. He wants our experience at the Feast of Tabernacles to instill in us a reverence for and obedience to—Him. And part of which comes from realizing that His grace and blessing has made all this joy possible. You would not be here unless God gave you grace. And then, He bestowed upon you the blessings—mostly spiritual blessings—that have changed your mind to the point where you are accepting of His way of life—you are accepting of the holy days and all the other things that go with living this way of life.

So, we have to understand that as we make use of the money, as we have joy in this feast, that it all goes back to His blessing—He has made it all possible.

The experience that He puts us through at the Feast of Tabernacles is intended to get us to think about cause and effect. They are intended to get us to think about the difference between our selves rejoicing here at the feast and having this extra, and being able to use all the finer things and enjoy the finer things, and then to look at this world and see that it is continuing in its ignorance. And it also is intended to get us to think about the resulting futures—us versus them.

Now that we know this way of life that God has revealed to us by His grace, and we are able to experience this foretaste, we should be able to have a pretty good idea of what the future will be for us, as compared with those who do not have this knowledge, do not have this joy, and do not have God constantly blessing.

Now, consider this: We understand that God's holy days lay out His plan. And, the Feast of Tabernacles has special significance to the time directly after the return of Jesus Christ, which we call the millennium—the 1,000 years of His reign with us at His side. We will not go there today, but Zechariah 14:16-18 show that example. The Egyptians, if they will not go up to the Feast of Tabernacles, do not get any rain. So, we see that the Feast of Tabernacles is something special for those people in the Millennium. It is their time. And they had better keep the Feast of Tabernacles, because it has a special significance to them, too.

Now we also know that the Feast of Tabernacles pictures an extended spiritual harvest. This is why it is seven days long. It is not just a quick thing where it is over in one day or one hour. It is an extended thing. In the plan and the ways that things work out in God's imagery of things, the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles pictures a long time in which a harvest takes place. So, we have come to understand that during this time—the future Millennium—millions will be converted and live in peace and prosperity under the loving and righteous government of Jesus Christ. They will be given a chance to live—in a utopia!

The biblical prophecies of this time period describe a perfect utopia. Maybe not quite right at the beginning because things have to be worked out, but within a short time. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong always thought it would be a generation or two and then things would become pretty much a perfect utopia. God's way would be instilled in everyone from their cradle on up, and people will live in harmony because everybody else is living in harmony. They will have their teachers and such that they can talk to; every city will be ruled by one of the Sons of God, and there is going to be all those things like bumper crops, and you name it—people will just not understand our times. They will not understand because they will have no reference point of thinking about it.

Satan will be out of the way so that he cannot influence men with his evil attitudes. People will be happy. They will have whatever they need. And upon learning the truth, even in the beginning, I think we will be pretty much surprised at how quickly people turn around. Once they learn the truth, I think they will turn to God. There will not be the hindrances of Satan any more. There might be a few tough ones—tough nuts to crack, but I think that within a few years of seeing the lives of other people who have turned and seeing their blessings, that they will turn around too.

There will be no war. War will cease. And the deserts will bloom.

Now, this is the time—the Feast of Tabernacles—that we have a foretaste of the Millennium. Yet, the rest of mankind—all those people out there, who are not in a church service like today within the churches of God—knows nothing about this. Virtually, nothing at all. And they are right now continuing to live in a world of sin. In their lives, right now, they are illustrating a world without God. It is the exact opposite of the way it will be in the millennium. And this world that they live in, without God, is growing increasingly worse. It is moving even farther away from the few biblical principles that they have known and put into practice.

Now, they may not call it a dystopia, but that is exactly what it is. That is what any civilization, any culture, any society is—without God. It is dystopia.

Their world is moving inevitably toward an even worse dystopian future—the dystopian traits that we might think about are just on the horizon. We are living kind of fine, now, but it will not be long before things begin to get worse.

And unfortunately, after this feast is over, we have to go back and live in it, too.

Please turn to II Timothy 3, please. You know these verses quite well. The apostle Paul, here, in II Timothy 3 describes our world.

II Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Does this not sound like our world? In many respects, yes. I would have to say that the first two descriptors describe modern America to a “t.” In terms of “lovers of themselves” and “lovers of money,” other terms that we use today would be narcissists (lovers of themselves), and materialists (lovers of money and the things it can buy). Just about everybody in the United States tends to fit into one or both of those categories it seems. It is all about “me” and how much “me” can acquire.

The last two “lovers of pleasure” and “not lovers of God” are also a hallmark of our culture, even though we think that it tends to be Christian. Well, as it says in the next verse, they have a form of godliness, but they deny the power of God. They deny what it can do. They will not come under it. And so, if there is ever a choice, just pick any American at random (I do not care who), if there is ever a choice between doing something pleasurable and doing something that would glorify God, Americans are far more likely to do the fun thing, or they can do this other thing for God later, because you may never get the chance to do that cool thing ever again.

Just think of their day of worship. Here is a day that they preach about from the pulpit saying that you should honor God on this day, that you should go to church. Some even talk about it in terms of it being a Sabbath, which it is not. But, there are some who are especially devout who still do try to keep a kind Sabbath on Sunday. But most people, and most of the preachers, according to what I have seen and read on the internet, go to church; they do their time and then they are off to the beach, or the movies, or the mall, or wherever they want to go. They “did what they were supposed to do,” and now they are going to do their own thing.

It is always the bare minimum for God, and the maximum for their good time.

Now, we in the churches of God have done alright dealing with these traits so far. I think we can deal with the narcissists, with the materialists, with those who love pleasure, and we have learned to deal with those who do not love God. But, I think we still are waiting for those traits in verse 3 to pop up over most of society. Life will be absolutely miserable when the majority of the population become unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, and despisers of good. I do not know if we are quite there yet.

Moffat’s translation puts it more bluntly: callous, relentless, scurrilous, dissolute, and savage; they will hate goodness. I do not think we are quite there yet. There are some who are like this, but I do not know that we are quite there. But, we can begin to see these traits coming out in people. They are not big and in your face quite yet, but they are coming. The prophecy is there. We will have to face them in the future. It is really hard to imagine the neighbor on your nicely groomed street being like this. Are your neighbors callous, relentless, scurrilous, dissolute, and savage?

It brings up visions of society like is shown in the movie, *Mad Max* or *The Book of Eli*. Have any of you seen that one (*The Book of Eli*)? It is quite a good movie. There is language and stuff that you would need to cover your ears and skip a few scenes. But the overall understanding in that movie is very thought provoking. It is a movie about a man preserving something very important in a very dystopian time. What is interesting is who is chosen to do it, and what it is that he is preserving, and where he has to go.

But, in these societies—*Mad Max*, and *The Book of Eli*—they cannot trust anyone—not the man on the street, or the store owner, not the person who even tries to help them. Everybody is out for something else, and they are all brutal and callous. They certainly despise anything good. It is all to be used for their own benefit. They are no longer thinking about the better things of life—the idealistic ones. It is only a dog-eat-dog kind of life.

But we have not quite gotten there yet. But, it is coming.

Moving down a few verses in II Timothy 3, Paul is talking to Timothy about his duties. And Paul says,

II Timothy 3:10-11 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions. . .

He is saying that Timothy had followed along in his footsteps, and had done a good job of mimicking Paul's good example. But, he is also giving him a warning...

II Timothy 3:11-13 . . . persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Now in the context, here, he is telling him, “Yes, we've gone through some persecutions together, and you followed my conduct in all those things that I have done, and you've endured well.” But he also said, “Those are not the worse things. They're still in the future, because men are going to grow worse. And, it is an invariable thing, that if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then you will have to meet some form of persecution.”

So, Paul foretells, here, an increased persecution of the church, because evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse. But, he does not mean just losing a job because you keep the Sabbath. That is hard enough on us, but he is talking about the kind of persecution that he suffered, where he was beaten

with rods; he was stoned; he had to be resurrected at least once (and who knows how many more times); all those things that are mentioned in those “perils of Paul” in II Corinthians 11:23-33. He goes through a whole list. And, the things that that man had to go through are just mind-numbing. . . to think of all the things that he had to endure to be a messenger of Jesus Christ. So, he is saying that those sorts of things are coming. And not just for the apostles and leadership, but all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

So, these things are coming—painful and brutal—as mentioned in those earlier verses at the top of this chapter, and they will not like good people. They will hate all manner of goodness. And if you are good, they will not like you, because you put them to shame.

Human beings are not getting better. As much as evolutionists and whatnot are trying to tell you, people are not getting better. They are getting worse; growing worse and worse; becoming more evil. Human nature agitated by Satan the Devil who knows his time is short, will progressively degenerate toward our baser behaviors. And it will look like *Mad Max* or *The Book of Eli* time, when people will knock you in the head for whatever you have got. And their rage and brutality will be especially against those who believe in Jesus Christ, and do the things that He has said, because the spirit that is behind this evil wants all that to happen. The spirit who is behind this—Satan the Devil—wants to hurt Christians, knocking them away from the true paths. And if it takes persecution, he is not above that at all. He will do whatever he can.

The value of life will in the future reach a new low. That is really hard to imagine with a million or more babies being aborted every year just here in the United States. You wonder how life could be any cheaper. But, in other places in the world it is cheaper. And it is coming, even on the blessed nations of Israel. And a Christian who stands for goodness, his life will not be tolerated—not for long.

It is very important that we see what is ahead, and then, what is ahead. Like I said, we have to go through dystopia to get to utopia. Part of this is what the Feast of Tabernacles season is all about—from the Feast of Trumpets onward through the Feast of Tabernacles. This is from our Savior Himself. It

is not easy to read, but it comes straight from His lips. So, we had better take heed.

Luke 21:11-18 And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. [You can be a good witness for Him.] Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. [We have some hope, here.] You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost.

He is talking eternally. He said some will die. So, it does not mean that you will not die. It is just saying that He has you in the palm of His hand. You are okay. If you do end up being one of the martyrs, He has got your back. You will live again.

Luke 21:19 By your patience possess your souls.

By your patient endurance, you will save your spiritual lives.

This gives us some idea of what is coming. Note that in verse 12, He says in terms of persecution, “Before all these things will come these sorts of persecutions.” And, the way that He phrases it, here, probably recognizes that Christians will always be persecuted. And they were, including Jesus Himself, and Stephen, the apostles throughout the first century.

There has been some level of persecution that has gone on through the church’s existence—through its history. But what He is saying, here, is that in this time of the end, specifically, it will reach a crescendo in what Revelation 6 calls “the sixth seal.” It is a time of horrendous Christian martyrdom. And, Jesus describes a time when Christians will be virtually

alone but for God Himself. They will have to stand on their own two feet. It will be only them before the judge, with Jesus Christ at their right hand, giving them the words and comfort that they need to face it.

The Christian will not even be able to turn to a relative or a friend, or anyone else he knows, because they will not back him up. They will be in fear of the state. They will be in fear of whoever is doing the persecuting of the Christian. And, everyone will hate the Christian.

We do not understand that. I do not think that any of us have ever faced a time where everybody hated us, where we could look around at a sea of faces, and see not one bit of pity or sympathy. That would be hard to take. Not a smile, not a wink, nothing. Just hatred everywhere.

We will just simply have to endure it. That is what Jesus said it will come down to. You just have to stand fast. You just have to hold on.

Dawn is coming. It may not come soon enough. But, with Christ, the dawn will come. We just have to hold fast.

Just try to get the feel of this passage in Mark. I will try to read it with some sort of emphasis so that we can get the understanding of what is going on here, because this is right at the end. Jesus says,

Mark 13:14-20 So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter. For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

Jesus describes a time of appalling anxiety in people; of intense “flight or fight trauma.” Things are going to happen. It says that as soon as you see the abomination stand in the holy place, get out! Do not take the time to go back. This has got to be a split second decision to leave, and to go because if you wait one more second, you might not make it. It is like the great stone door is coming down upon you, and you have got to run for all you are worth and slide under it and get out before it crashes down, trapping you—sort of like Indiana Jones—that is the sort of thing He is talking about.

This is the key. You see it, get out! If you are out in the field, do not go back. Leave whatever is there—your cloak, your garment, your luggage; whatever it is, do not go back even for people, your wife, or your children, just get! Your life depends upon it. And they will be seeing the same things and getting out themselves. For you to go back would be futile. Go! Move! It is time! You do not want to be trapped.

And He says that any kind of weakness, any kind of disability, or dependency, will be a severe liability—such as women who are pregnant, or nursing little children. It is not that these are bad, but at that time such things will slow you down. Things are going to be moving at a breathtaking pace. You do not want anything to keep you from getting to where you need to be.

Can you imagine the stress of that time? It is hard for us to imagine that. Even the season may make the difference between life and death. Yeah, we would rather that it be spring or summer. We do not want it to be wintertime, because that will slow everything down, and you need to move. You might be exposed to the elements for longer than you would think you would be, and a bad winter ... even in Jerusalem, where He is talking about, it gets cold there. They get snow there. And a bad winter could mean that you die while fleeing.

You get the feeling of what Jesus is talking about, here. We need to be ready to move at a moment’s notice. And just get out and go where He sends you.

We may think that we can imagine those things. And I have done a poor job of trying to describe it right now. But, Jesus says that no one has ever gone through anything as severe as the tribulation, here. I mean, we look at the videos or the pictures of places like Auschwitz, or go to the holocaust

museum. And they were very bad. We look at the atrocities that happened in Cambodia, Russia, China, Ukraine, and various other places—Armenia, Uganda—and we think they are bad. And they were. Genocide happening here, there, and seems like everywhere. We think of the destruction that happened during WWII—cities totally bombed out, rubble only left. Hardly a person left alive. Bombing runs that did not just take out the factories, but took out residences and neighborhoods, apartment complexes; taking thousands and millions of lives over an extended period of time.

And from these we can get a kind of an idea of what it might be like. But, if we are going to believe our Savior, He says that we have no idea, because no one has ever, ever, experienced a time as bad as this one is going to be. And that is why He says, you have got to be ready. You have got to be ready spiritually, and you have got to be ready physically. And when He says “go,” you go. When He says, stop, you stop.

What does that mean? How close are we going to have to be to Him, to be able to know when to zig when He zigs, and zag when He zags?

Every life on this planet will be in danger of being snuffed out. And only—ONLY—God’s intervention—only His love for His elect—only His love for His spiritual children will prevent that from happening, because that is how bad it is going to get.

You talk about dystopia! The great tribulation is the height and depth of dystopia! No writer or author can describe it.

You take something like *The Hunger Games*? Magnify it about a thousand times, and you will still not be as bad as the great tribulation. It is very bad. It is going to be just horrible.

Notice Zechariah 13. God says through Zechariah,

Zechariah 13:8 “And it shall come to pass in all the land,” Says the LORD, “That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, [right off the bat, two-thirds gone] but one-third shall be left in it [there is still hope]: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on

My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

Notice, we start out with two-thirds dying. We have one-third left. They will be severely tested like gold and silver are tried in fire.

Jot down Isaiah 6:13 where it hints that only a tenth will remain after the trying is finished. He takes this one-third and ends with one-tenth remaining.

Notice the horrible conditions and atrocities of the coming dystopia: war; pillaging; rape; captivity; all of it lasting until the moment that Christ returns. It is just going to get worse, and worse, and worse. It will be a miracle—truly—it will be a miracle for anyone on the face of the earth to live to see Christ descend on the Mount of Olives. That is how bad it is going to be.

But, Christ does come back. The light at the end of the tunnel may just be a speck, but it is there.

Turn to Joel 3.

Joel 3:1-2 "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land.

Joel 3:9-18 Proclaim this among the nations: "Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am strong.'" Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. Let the nations be awakened,

and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again." And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Acacias.

So Christ finally comes back to set things straight. He calls all the armies of rebellious mankind, and gathers them to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. This is the valley between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem—between the Temple area, and the Mount of Olives.

And then He says that He is going to deal with them in His fury! He has put up with so much from mankind, and He is just going to let them have it for all that dystopia that they put His people through. Not just us, but all the people of Israel.

As Zechariah 14 shows, He causes them to fight each other, and then He simply melts them with a plague.

Revelation 14 says that the blood comes up to the horse's bridles for 184 miles! This is when He sticks the sickle into the winepress of His wrath.

Do you think you have had it up to here with all the things that are going on in this world? He has had to put up with it for 6,000 years! And, the intensity of His righteous rage is building. And He is just going to let it all out here, because mankind needs to be taught a lesson.

God says through Joel very clearly that He does this to avenge His people, and to be a shelter and a strength to them.

You will be avenged. If you are one of those people who has to give a witness by your life, then Christ has your back, and true justice will occur.

But then, He gets to the utopian part in verses 17 and 18. His victory ushers in a Millennial new age of productivity and prosperity—and something more. This is the important part. It is found in the description of the fountain flowing from the House of the Lord and watering the Valley of Acacias.

The Valley of Acacias is not one we have on the top of our mind concerning the geography of the land of Israel. It is found across the Jordan, opposite Jericho. So, this stream that flows from the House of the Lord goes east to that low area where the Jordan River is, but it goes across that area flowing into what would be considered the other nations. The Jordan has always been a sort of eastern boundary for the land of Israel. We remember that Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh lived over there, and that was not part of the original deal. They liked that land, and so God allowed them to have it so long as they came along and helped Israel fight and settle the land. But, God was taking them beyond Jordan on the west side of the river.

So, the imagery, here, is of God's Spirit not only flowing out into Israel, but flowing across Jordan into the other lands beyond the boundaries of His people. The image is of God's Spirit flowing outward to encompass all nations. As you know, a stream does not stop but keeps moving on. And that is the imagery, here. It will start at Jerusalem where God is, and it will move outward—not just eastward—but northward, southward, and westward as well. It is going to flow out to humanity as a whole.

Eventually and probably very quickly, it will bring utopian conditions to everyone who submits to the Lord God who dwells—actually lives in Person—in Jerusalem.

Let us finish in Ezekiel 36.

Ezekiel 36:23-30 "And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord God, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations."

Ezekiel 36:33-36 Thus says the Lord God: "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.' Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it."

The difference between dystopia and utopia will be God dwelling among His people. God's spirit will replace Satan's spirit as the guiding force of this world. And, it will produce utopia. The people will have free access to that spirit. And, they will gladly take it, I believe, after all that they have been through. The land will yield its produce; the cities will be rebuilt; and the ravages of sin (and it will still be around) will be so much less. The people will still have the ability to sin, and they will. But, it is not going to take the toll that it has taken in our world.

What was horribly dystopian will become wonderfully utopian.

The Wonderful World Tomorrow—God's Kingdom—is really not that far off. And though we have to go through dystopia to get there, it will be worth it. And it says that there will come a time when we will not even remember it. It will be so wonderful where we are at that time.

Our Eternal God has spoken it. And, He will do it!