The Future of Planet Earth

—

and the Bible
The Future of Planet Earth — and the Bible

Michael Hardt
Climate change: we now know that polar caps are melting, and that they are doing so faster than we feared, leading to rising sea levels. We also know that permafrost\(^1\) soil is melting, resulting in more greenhouse gases and, hence, more warming and more melting of ice and permafrost – a vicious circle of mutually reinforcing effects accelerating

\(^1\) Ground or soil with a temperature that remains at or below the freezing point for two or more years.
Environment: though much is being done to curb pollution, there is still far too much of it: just think of non-biodegradable plastic in the oceans and poisonous gases in the air. CO2 emissions have risen to unprecedented levels, and the so-called green technologies used to reduce CO2 emissions have severe environmental side effects (much lauded electromobility, for instance, may well bring cleaner air to cities, but electric cars need batteries which, in turn, need lithium, which is won from groundwater – and that exploitation process has a serious negative impact on the environment (e.g. Atacama desert, Peru)).
Biodiversity: This is a consequence of the damage done to the environment. The long list of species threatened with extinction speaks for itself: the threat to biodiversity is real.

\(^1\) Over 19,000 species are included on the ‘species threatened with extinction’ list produced by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.
Oh, and then there is the problem of **depletion of limited natural resources** (everything from water to fossil fuels) which would be problematic even with a stagnant population, but then the human population is all but stagnant (it now stands at 7.7 bn, which means it has doubled during my life time (and I am no octogenarian!)).
There is also the fact of unprecedented geo-political risk. As Stephen Hawkins pointed out, intelligence is not necessarily to a species’ advantage because, at least in the case of the human species, intelligence leads to technology and the technology we now have is able to destroy the planet. Put very concisely, he said\(^1\): “We have tech to destroy world, but nothing to prevent it”. The apparent desire of some regimes to produce nuclear weapons is concerning – not to mention the alarming prospect of chemical and biological warfare.

\(^1\) International Business Times, 03/12/2016.
These issues are not made up. They supply the material for the headlines of the world press on a regular basis, and they rank high on political and corporate agendas. So much so that it may not be necessary to go into some of the more obscure threats that have occupied people’s minds: large scale disasters, giant asteroids hitting the earth, supernovas, gamma ray bursts, etc. Without denying the possibility of such phenomena we all know that it would take far less than that to destroy the earth, and mankind with it.
What’s the solution?

What’s the way out? Subterranean cities? Colonies in space? Interstellar travel? A space station as a kind of intergalactic ark? Enormous sums are spent on space programmes and great feats have been made – but no real solution is in sight (neither a habitable planet nor a way of getting there).

So, I hear you ask, what is the solution, then? Hoping it won’t happen (or not so soon)?
What Bible readers know

The Bible (yes – that best-seller of all times) has much to say about the future – including the future of the earth. And I’ll come back to this in a moment. But let me first tell you why it is that, unfortunately, most people choose not to consult the Bible. Then, for those who pluck up the courage to read on, I will give a brief summary of what the Bible does tell us on this issue.
A strange phenomenon

Strangely, at first sight, many people choose not to read the Bible. Why is this? If millions and millions of people around the world treasure it more than anything else and testify to how this book has transformed their lives for the better, why don’t people give it a try? The simple answer is that they tend to flee from it like earthworms from the light – for obvious reasons (I remember how I used to do this). You can try this out for yourself. Pick a book in the Old or New Testament and read a few paragraphs. You will notice very quickly that this book tells you the truth. It’s God talking to you. Someone who knows you in and out. And you will realise the bad news first: I am a sinner, my life is not good enough for God. However, you will also discover the great news: that God is a Saviour and that He wants to forgive you, so much so that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to save you. If you don’t have a Bible, then get one now – or simply go online and use one of the many online Bibles available on the net.
For those brave enough to take a Bible into your hands and to start reading it, we will now look at what it has to say on the future.

**Does the Bible actually foretell the future?**

Yes, it does. It has done so many times. There is no other book that has a track record of fulfilled prophecy that would be remotely similar to that of the Bible. To give you a flavour, here are some examples. The first group of fulfilled prophecies¹ relate to events that occurred during Old Testament times:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The four world empires (Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The captivity of Israel in Babylon</td>
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<tr>
<td>The end of Israel’s captivity in Babylon after 70 years</td>
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<td>The Persian king Cyrus (foretold and even named by prophet Isaiah</td>
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<td>around 100 years prior to his birth)</td>
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<td>The fact that Cyrus would facilitate the rebuilding of the temple</td>
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<td>and of the destroyed city of Jerusalem</td>
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The second group of fulfilled prophecy relates to the coming of Christ himself:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Scripture References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>His birthplace, Bethlehem</td>
<td>Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:4-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>The time of his birth</td>
<td>Dan 9:25,26, Neh 2:4-8, Luke 2:1,2; 3:23</td>
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<tr>
<td>His genealogy – in particular that he would descend from Abraham, Judah, and David</td>
<td>Genesis 18:18 Galatians 3:8</td>
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<td>His sufferings</td>
<td>Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Psalm 69, etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>His being sold for 30 pieces of silver</td>
<td>Zechariah 11:13, Matthew 26:16; 27:3,9</td>
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<td>His death by crucifixion</td>
<td>Psalm 22:17, John 19:18; 20:20</td>
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<tr>
<td>His resurrection</td>
<td>Psalm 16:10; Matthew 28:7; Mark 16:9; etc</td>
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1 7x69 = 483 years from the edict to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh 2) to the crucifixion of Christ (John 19).
This is just a very small selection of many\(^1\). You will notice that these predictions were made over an extremely long time period (500-1000 years\(^2\)), and by different people, and they were very precise (e.g. predicting the village of Messiah’s birth). Nobody would have wanted to ‘act’ the fulfilment of such prophecies (such as being crucified), nor could have done so (what influence do you have on your birth place, for instance?).

So, if any book has a track record in getting things right when it comes to predictions, it is the Bible.

\(^1\) In his book “All Messianic Prophecies of the Bible” Herbert Lockyer surveys—on over 500 pages—a truly amazing list of fulfilled messianic prophecies.

\(^2\) Zechariah prophesied around 530 BC, David around 1000 BC, and the others (Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Hosea, etc.) in between these two.
What does the Bible tell us about the future?

We can only give you a high-level summary here. The best would be to turn to all the Bible passages in question and see for yourself. You can find them here: www.biblecentre.org¹. But let’s start with a quick overview.

¹ http://biblecentre.org/content.php?mode=7&item=731.
Israel

Why start with Israel? You will have noticed that the amount of press coverage Israel gets is disproportionately high measured by any of the usual indicators (size, population, GDP, etc.). Bible readers know why that is.

The Bible has been telling us, for the best part of the last two millennia, that the people of Israel will return to that land (refs...). For almost 1,900 years (since the Jews were defeated by the Romans in AD 70 and dispersed across the globe), the fulfilment of this prediction seemed to be a pure impossibility. That changed in 1948 when the world saw the foundation of the state of Israel in the Middle East. This event is not the final fulfilment of these prophecies, but it shows us that this is far less improbable than was always thought. Bible scholars have often predicted this event, the return of the Jews to Palestine – even before 1948.

World events will continue to shape up around Israel. In fact, its role will become more and more central.
Europe

The Bible also talks about Europe – albeit not under this name. In the language of the Bible it is the fourth world empire, i.e. the Roman empire. The Bible stated that this empire would be destroyed (as it has been) but also tells us that it will be ‘revived’. Over the past few decades we have seen calls for ever closer European integration, and a lot of movement in this direction. Again, this may not be the final fulfilment of the Biblical prophecies about the Roman Empire – but you can see how the stage is being set.
Syria and Russia

The Bible also describes how Israel will be surrounded by enemies, with the most severe threat coming from the ‘king of the north’. From Israel’s perspective this points to Syria (possibly in alliance with Iraq and Iran). The king of the north (Syria) will be supported by the king of the uttermost north (Russia). The involvement of Russia in affairs in Syria in recent years may also be an indication of the stage being set for Biblical prophecies to be fulfilled.
The battle of Armageddon

Because Israel will come under severe threat from Syria and Russia, it will form an alliance with Europe (and most likely America\textsuperscript{1}).

The king of the north will then overrun Israel and move further south, to Egypt. Israel will seek help from Europe and, in response, Europe will deploy a dangerously well-equipped army to Israel. At the same time, the armies of the East (predicted in the Bible to be 200 million strong – a number that has been unimaginable for centuries but no longer is) – to Israel. These armies, and those of ‘the kings of the earth’ will meet in the battle field of Armageddon (thought to be the valley of Megiddo: ‘Har Megiddo’) in northern Israel. The armies of the king of the north will then return from Egypt to join the battle in Israel.

\textsuperscript{1} America was largely populated by emigrants from Britain and the rest of Europe and, therefore, is – most likely – to be seen in biblical prophecy as part of Europe (but this is of little importance).
What will happen?

At this point, the course of events will take an unexpected turn. Christ will appear. The nations and their armies will be petrified. They decide that Christ is their new, and common, enemy and, therefore, instead of fighting each other they will join forces to fight against Him – who will destroy them “with the breath of his mouth”.
No way of escape?

Yes, there is a way of escape – but only one (and no, it’s not a space ark). Let’s step back a little so we can see the big picture. In a nutshell what all of this is saying is simple and clear:

God is very patient. Over the centuries, people have turned away from Him, ridiculed Him, and explained Him away.

God is holy. He cannot overlook sin – or just turn a blind eye to it.

But God is also love. He has spoken to the human race, many times. He has sent prophets and, in the end, He sent His Son, 2000 years ago (the event that still determines our calendar in many countries today). He gave everything – His Son – for you and me. He did this to pay for the guilt of anyone who would accept the offer.
He has kept this offer open for the best part of the last 2000 years. Chances are it will not be open much longer. The Bible tells us that God will judge the world, and Armageddon is part of this.

Today, mankind falls into two groups, although, in one sense, they are all the same: all have sinned, all have gone away from God, and none can make up for this, not even by leading a life that is ever so good, devoted, loving, etc. – you name it! But in another sense thy fall into two groups: those who accept God’s offer and those who don’t; those who want to be saved, and those who think they don’t need to be saved.
So, where does this leave me, and the planet?

Where this leaves you depends on you alone. Either on God’s side or not. Either saved by Jesus Christ, His Son, or not. Either safe or lost.

For those in the first group, the future is safe. Jesus will return. You will spend eternity with Him. It will be pure bliss and happiness.

And the planet? Well, God’s plans always come to pass. His plan for the planet has always been that man should reign over it in righteousness and peace. And this plan will come to pass. Jesus will judge those who have rejected God’s offer, and then set up His kingdom. Then the earth will blossom and mankind will prosper.
So what about sustainability?

Sustainability is still important. There is no reason to spoil God’s creation, to waste scarce resources or to damage the environment through pollution.

And yet, having said this, there is an even more pressing question: Which side are you on? Where will you spend eternity? Are all your hopes centered in this world that heads for calamity – big time? What do you have that you cannot lose, that nobody can take from you, and that will last beyond the time you have left on this planet?
“Come to me, all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (1 Timothy 1:15)