

What's Next Series

Pestilences

Luke 21:11

Tonight a menacing plague is stalking our planet.

Quietly in farms and homes across Asia a global, deadly, unstoppable influenza pestilence is mutating, strengthening—and trying to find a way out.

Last time it got out almost four million people died in 1964.

The time before that almost eighty million died in 1918. In fact, 1918 was the greatest disaster America has ever had with almost ½ million dying in just a few weeks time.

Now to get this all in perspective, think of the big picture of planet earth. Almost five million people die each month on earth anyway—but Jesus warned of something bigger. Something frightful. He said that a plague, a pestilence, a wall of death is going to stalk the entire planet. He said that if these catastrophic events didn't stop they would wipe out all human life.

World Vital Events Per Time Unit: 2005

Time unit	Births	Deaths	increase
Year	129,908,352	56,622,744	73,285,608
Month	10,825,696	4,718,562	6,107,134
Day	355,913	155,131	200,782
Hour	14,830	6,464	8,366
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Listen to Jesus as we open again to Luke 21:11 where we see that one of the signs of His Coming is when we see the onslaught of global pestilences.

Luke 21:11 And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

There have always been diseases, plagues, and pestilences—but never have they been global until the advent of Global Travel. Think about it—most carriers of a plague would

die before they got very far up until the 19th century with steam engines. Then with air travel in the 20th century—it is now possible to harbor a plague or pestilence, board a flight and land before you get to the final stages and thus expose everyone around you to that plague.

Look at what Jesus also said in the same context. Mark and Matthew capture this same message. Only they also record that Jesus said something ominous about how powerful these pestilences will be.

Mark 13:20 *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.*

Matthew 24:22 *And unless those days were shortened, **no flesh would be saved**; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.*

Remember the ominous proportion of this future pestilence being an extinction level event,

and remembering the nearly self-limiting nature of ancient travel speeds—no one could live long enough to spread these plagues globally until the 20th century.

Now think back to last Sunday night as I was speaking the news of the deadly advent of a global plague began to cross the news lines. It is amazing that instead of talking about what may happen—we are now talking about what IS happening.

Listen to the February 28th edition of New Yorker Magazine¹ (that is tomorrow's edition):

*" The vicious avian flu that has killed dozens of people in Vietnam, Thailand, and elsewhere in the region has caused the deaths of hundreds of millions of animals in nearly a dozen Asian countries in the past two years **and could kill millions of people** if it becomes capable of spreading efficiently among humans. **No such virus has ever spread so quickly** over such a wide geographical area, and, unlike most viruses, this one has already affected a more diverse group than any other type of flu, and it has killed many animals previously thought to be resistant."*

One farmer whose chickens were killed by the virus says,

*"It's so hard to watch. One day, they're all alive and healthy-the vets were here the week before to check them-and the next day they're dying by the thousand. It happened so quickly. **They started shivering**, thousands of them at once. And **then they started to fall**. Every one of them. **They just fell over, dead.**"*

Scott Dowell, the director of the Centers for Disease Control's Thailand office, tells Specter,

¹ Michael Specter, "Nature's Bioterrorist" (p.50), February 28, 2005, issue of The New Yorker.

"The world just has no idea what it's going to see if this thing comes. When, really. It's when. I don't think we can afford the luxury of the word 'if' anymore.... The clock is ticking. We just don't know what time it is."

Robert Webster, a virologist at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, in Memphis, who has been studying avian influenza for decades, is even more stark.

*"**This is the worst flu virus** I have ever seen or worked with or read about. We have to prepare as if we were going to war-and the public needs to understand that clearly. This virus is playing its role as a natural bioterrorist. . . . if it does happen, and I fully expect that it will, **there will be no place for any of us to hide.** Not in the United States or in Europe or in a bunker somewhere. The virus is a very promiscuous and effective killer."*

Not all politicians have ignored the threat; when Tommy Thompson, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, announced his resignation, last December, he cited an avian- influenza epidemic as one of the greatest dangers the United States faces.

*The World Health Organization's conservative estimate of the number of deaths that an epidemic would cause is **seven million worldwide.***

*Michael Osterholm, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, calculates that a pandemic on the scale of the devastating global influenza epidemic of 1918 **would kill at least a hundred and eighty million people today.** Specter reports on the efforts of health officials in the United States, Thailand, and other countries to contain the virus as best they can. Developing...²*

Here is another headline from the news this week--

Avian Flu World's No. 1 Threat, CDC Head Says

*Avian flu poses the single biggest threat to the world right now and health officials *may not yet have all the tools they need to fight it, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Julie Gerberding said on Monday.**

"This is a very ominous situation for the globe. I think we can all recognize a similar pattern probably occurred prior to 1918," she said, referring to the 1918 pandemic of influenza, which also passed from birds to people and killed between 20 million and 40 million people globally.

*The H5N1 avian flu, which first appeared in Hong Kong in 1997 and has since popped up twice, **is evolving and can jump directly from birds to people,***

² Drudge MAG: Avian Flu, On the Verge of an Epidemic Sun Feb 20 2005 11:30:41 ET.

killing an estimated 72 percent of diagnosed victims, Gerberding said. Officials have documented 45 deaths so far from avian flu.

Gerberding said influenza was far more infectious than severe acute respiratory syndrome or SARS, which swept out of China in 2003, killing 800 people and causing global concern before it was stopped.

*Health experts have also pointed out influenza kills much faster than diseases such as AIDS, **taking tens of millions of lives in the space of weeks or months.***

People transmit flu before they become ill themselves so it would be almost impossible to stop it by watching or isolating sick people, Gerberding said.³

This assessment, she said, is based on the known history of the flu virus.

The avian flu now spreading in Asia is part of what is called the H1 family of flu viruses. It is a pathogen that is notorious in human history.

"Each time we see a new H1 antigen emerge, we experience a pandemic of influenza," said Gerberding. In 1918, H1 appeared and [up to 40] millions died worldwide. In 1957, the Asian flu [less than a million deaths] was an H2, and the Hong Kong flu [3-4 million deaths] in 1968 was a H3.

There had been small appearances of the H1-type of avian viruses in other years, but nothing like the H5 now rampaging through the birds of Asia.

Study already has shown that the virus can infect cats who can then infect other cats, which Gerberding said was "another harbinger" of the possibility of a human pandemic.

"The science here is all alerting us that we have a great deal to be concerned about," she said. The CDC chief said her agency is getting ready for a possible pandemic next year.⁴

Now for those of us who just let everything fly by us, listen--here is what all that means.

When the World Health Organization starts comparing a new flu virus to the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, it is something that should cause everyone to sit up and take notice.

³ Feb 21, 2:07 PM (ET) By Maggie Fox, Health and Science Correspondent WASHINGTON (Reuters).
<http://www.centralchronicle.com/20050223/2302142.htm> <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,148270,00.html>

⁴ CDC: Bird Flu Could Become Epidemic, Tuesday, February 22, 2005, **Associated Press**
<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,148270,00.html>

The 1918 epidemic was the worst epidemic the United States has ever experienced. It was so virulent that it caused the median life expectancy of Americans in 1918 to drop by ten years. More than a half-million Americans died after contracting the virus.

World-wide, it was so deadly that **it killed between 25 and 40 MILLION people in 1918-1919**. The strain was unusual in that it killed young and healthy victims, as opposed to more common influenzas which caused the bulk of their mortality among the old and infirm.

People without symptoms could be struck suddenly and be rendered too feeble to walk within hours; many would die the next day. Symptoms included a blue tint to the face and coughing up blood.

Nobody was safe from the Spanish Flu. The only inhabited place of any real size that wasn't touched by an outbreak of the virus was the island of Marajo at the mouth of the Amazon River.

In the case of H5N1, the incubation period after exposure is between two and ten days. It takes less than 12 hours to fly from anywhere in the world to almost anywhere else.

A person could become infected in Asia, hop a plane to the States, ride mass transit and eat in restaurants for a week before coming down with any symptoms.

Everybody who came in contact with that first person would also have between two and ten days to infect everybody they came in contact with.

H5N1 could duplicate the 1918 pandemic in a matter of weeks, rather than months.

Now turn to the inspired ending of human history, when the Lord is reeling in the rebellious planet look at Revelation 6 with me.

"And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth." (Revelation 6:8)

The rider on the pale horse begins his deadly ride at some point during the Tribulation, and before his ride is over, a quarter of the population of mankind will be dead, from either war, famine or 'the beasts of the earth'.

The word translated 'beasts' is 'therion' in Greek, and means a 'venomous beast'.

H5N1 is a viral infection that scientists fear has crossed over from the beasts of the earth to human to human transmission. A virus is, in and of itself, a living thing -- a 'venomous beast' by definition.

Taken together with the other signs of the soon return of the Lord, we have something of a loose time frame. For two thousand years, that time frame was 'someday, eventually.'

For this generation, the ability to kill a quarter of mankind with war, famine and infectious disease fits into a time frame of today, tomorrow, or, as Dr Simor observed, **"if not this year or the next, the following year", depending on the 'if-then' factor. .**

IF Iran doesn't get nuclear weapons,
IF the Pakistanis and Indians don't nuke each other,
IF North Korea doesn't use its atomic bombs,
IF a vaccine is discovered for H5N1,
IF terrorists don't get their hands on bio-weapons,
IF no global war arises out of our newly articulated policy of spreading democracy into the Third World, and
IF the Middle East conflict doesn't spark a global thermonuclear war first, THEN, maybe it might take a little longer.

But before all this,

"the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

"Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1st Thessalonians 4:16-18) ⁵

Do you have that hope? Is Christ's forgiveness applied to your life? If not, it can be today. God still stands with open arms saying:

Isaiah 45:22 "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

So many people around us could die in the next year—unexpectedly and rapidly, and most of them LOST.

They would enter at death the place called by various terms in God's Word--the grave, hades, hell, the pit, and sheol.

That is a place that has been feared since the earliest times of life on this planet. It is a dark place of endless night, a dreary place of never hope. Most people think about this place more and more the older we get.

⁵ Vol: 40 Issue: 25 - Tuesday, January 25, 2005 - Plain Text, The Beasts of the Earth.

There are dozens of verses in the Bible that take us through the door of death and let us tour the afterlife. We have toured heaven several times in our prophetic studies.

Tonight I would like to take you on a tour of the grave--the destination of the vast majority of people that you live with, work with, and see around you in daily life. "You and I, everybody you meet, from the mailman to the guy next to you at work, has an eternal destiny. That destiny is either a joyful existence in the presence of God, or a Christ-less eternity in the place prepared for the devil and his angels. It is a real place."⁶

Now let me show you something that may change the whole way you look at death, dying, the grave and the afterlife. The expert witness, the only one who has ever gone to the grave and returned to report on it is Jesus. And no one has more to say and has a greater reliability on this to do with the afterlife than Jesus. As Revelation 1 says—He alone has the keys to death and to the grave! Here is what He has revealed.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 12:16-20

Then **He spoke a parable** to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! **This night your soul will be required of you**; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

Now turn a few chapters to Luke 16. Here Jesus tells of Lazarus and the rich man. Luke 16:19-20:

"**There was** a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate,

Hold on. Look what is missing. Jesus did NOT say, 'Learn the parable of the rich man'. No He speaks in a different way, He said 'there WAS a certain rich man.' Jesus was speaking of a literal event of which He, as God, had knowledge. Now continue reading:

Luke 16:22-24 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

⁶ The Omega Letter Intelligence Digest, Vol: 6 Issue: 21 - Friday, February 21, 2003.

Stop again. Jesus is explaining another truth to us here. Before the Cross when their Pardon was paid, the righteous dead, like Abraham, Moses, etc, did NOT go directly to heaven, as do Blood-bought Christians of the Church Age. Instead, they went to Paradise. The grave, sheol, hades was at that time divided in two, one a place of comfort, (Abraham's bosom) the other a place of torment, but both located physically in the grave, or hell as it is called in many places.

Note also that the rich man can see Lazarus, that he speaks of literal torment and literal flame. Abraham explains the division of hell, and that Lazarus cannot come to him.

Now look at the account again as the rich man cries out.

Luke 16:27-28 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

Stop here again. Note that the rich man remembers his life on earth. As he will for eternity. He remembers his loved ones, and is conscious of their destiny. He begs Abraham to do something, but Abraham simply tells him that

Luke 16:29-31 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

Now note something EXTREMELY revealing about the exchange. Abraham is Abraham. Lazarus the beggar, is Lazarus. But the rich man has no name. He has his memories, he has his awareness of his surroundings, he knows the hopelessness of the situation and the only thing he wants more than a drink of water is to save his five brothers. But HE HAS NO NAME! Why is that so important? Because he doesn't need one. Nobody will ever speak it again. There is no reprieve, no visitors, no hope and no need for a name. To all intents and purposes, he is dead, although eternally aware of it.

Eternal, conscious, perpetual, lonely torment, dead forever, yet alive, remembering that one time when you could have escaped the torment.

That is what awaits the mailman, or the guy next to you, or your friends or relatives of whom we say, "I'll talk to him when the time is right" or when he says, "I'll think about it. Maybe tomorrow."

Then God says, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

These are the last days.

The Rapture is coming, the Tribulation is almost upon us, the King is coming!

But He isn't here yet. And there are plenty of people alive today who won't be here then, either.⁷

INVESTIGATING THE INEVITABLE: DEATH & HELL

In the time it takes me to say this sentence, 18 human beings awoke in eternity because they died on earth.

And, that was in 10 seconds.

Every hour, 6,464 die. That's 155,131 per day – about fifty-six million a year – and about 108 since I started one minute ago.

So what should we remember from this study in God's Word today? Three things:

Life is fragile.

Our lives are but a vapor the Lord says. We can be healthy, strong, and full of life today. A tiny virus can make us sick tomorrow, the next day we shiver, and the next day we can fall over dead--just like the countless birds dying in Asia today. Life is fragile!

Death is inevitable.

We all have to die, a few of us will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at Christ's Coming—but all lost people and most believers have an appointment with death. It is inevitable. Death is unstoppable and inescapable. With the weather growing more violent, people growing more openly wicked, with warfare becoming more globally lethal, with pestilences stalking the planet like never before—life truly is fragile, and God has said that death is inevitable.

Christ is the only answer.

Flu shots can't help our souls. The UN is not able to stop the growth of evil. The only hope is found in God's Word. The only escape pathway is laid out by Him.

Listen to Jesus as he warns us of where people who neglect Him are headed.

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I believe that we must pause and reflect on the destination of all those travelers from earth. JESUS DID – HE told a story at the height of His popularity.

- 2 ENTRANCE GATES – the wide and the small
- 2 ROADS – broad and narrow
- 2 DESTINATIONS – destruction and life
- 2 GROUPS OF TRAVELERS – many and few
- 2 LIFESTYLES – the sayers and the doers
- 2 INEVITABLE ENDS – being throw into fire and entering the kingdom of heaven

LET'S NOTE HIS WORDS – FOR HE WOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS. He created the measureless universe. He calls the numberless stars by name. He has numbered each of the hairs upon our heads, the days of our lives, the words we will give an account to Him for.

YES, HE IS QUALIFIED TO SPEAK, AND DOES, WARNING US OF HELL! AND, HE DOES SO 40+ TIMES IN MATTHEW ALONE – LET'S LOOK AT THEM. In fact, get a pen and mark these on paper or in your Bible. WHY? Hell is being lost as a time doctrine. J. Stott has recently moved away from it as are others. If Jesus Christ preached it, so should we.

Matthew:

3:7 (John, the Baptist) "Flee from wrath to come"

3:10 (John, the Baptist) "Thrown into fire"

3:12 (John the Baptist) "He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"

5:22 (Christ) "Shall be guilty into the hell of fire"

5:29 (Christ) "Then for your whole body to be thrown into hell"

5:30 (Christ) "To go into Hell"

7:13 (Christ) "Way is broad that leads to destruction"

7:19 (Christ) "And thrown into the fire"

7:23 (Christ) "Depart from me, I never knew you."

8:12 (Christ) "Cast out into the outer darkness, in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"

8:29 (Demons) "To torment us before the time"

8:15 (Christ) "In the day of judgment, than for that city"

8:28 (Christ) "Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"

11:22-24 (Christ) "More tolerable" (2X) "Descend into Hades"

12:32 (Christ) "Not forgiven...this age or to come"

12:36 (Christ) "Give account in the day of judgement"

12:41-42 (Christ) "At the judgment"

13:30 (Christ) "To burn them up"
13:40 (Christ) "Gathered up and burned with fire"
13:42 (Christ) "Cast them into the furnace of fire" In that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"
13:48 (Christ) "Bad (fish) they threw away"
13:49 (Christ) "Wicked from among righteous"
13:50 (Christ) "Furnace fire....weep and gnash"
15:13-14 (Christ) "Shall be rooted up...fall into a pit
15:18 (Christ) Gates of Hades
15:25 (Christ) Lose His life
15:26 (Christ) Forfeits his soul
15:27 (Christ) Recompense every man
18:8 (Christ) Eternal fire v.9 "Hell of Fire"

CHRIST'S STORIES DIDN'T ALL HAVE GOOD ENDINGS...

MATTHEW

18:34 (Christ) Handed over to torturers...
21:41 (Christ) Bring them to wretched end
21:44 (Christ) It will crush...
22:7 (Christ) Destroyed and set city on fire
22:13 (Christ) Bind hand and foot, cast outer darkness
23:14 (Christ) Greater condemnation
23:15 (Christ) Son of Hell
23:33 (Christ) Sentence of Hell
24:51 (Christ) Cut him in pieces (scourge) Place with hypocrites – weeping and gnashing
25:30 (Christ) Cast out the worthless slave-outer darkness–weeping & gnashing
25:41 (Christ) Depart accursed ones into eternal fire prepared for devil and his angels
25:46 (Christ) Eternal punishment

MARK

1:24 (Demon) Have you come to destroy us?
5:7 (Demon) "Swear to God you won't torture me"

ANYONE ELSE? YES.

PAUL

2 Thess. 1-9 Eternal Destination
Romans 2:9 Tribulation and Angels

PETER

2 Peter 2:4 Prison and Abyss

HEBREWS

Heb. 10: 31 Fearful thing

JOHN

Rev. 19: 20; 20: 10,15 Sea burning with fire and brimstone

Rev. 14: 11 Smoke torment rises forever

JUDE

Jude v.6-13 Eternal fire, blackness, darkness, forever

LET'S SUMMARIZE THE BIBLICAL PRESENTATION OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN HELL IN FOUR POINTS:

1. IT IS THE PLACE OF ETERNAL, UNENDING PAIN, MISERY AND TORTURE - A darkness so impenetrable than the countless ages of eternity that none of the lost will ever see light or relief – no wonder they are wailing, howling and gnashing teeth.
2. IT IS THE PLACE WHERE BODY AND SOUL ARE TORMENTED. All will be raised, both saved and lost (Jn. 5:28/Dan. 12:2 – some to bless – the rest to horror. The worm dieth not. Mark 9: 48 – Eating the conscience and the flesh? Never consumed by the hellish worms that feed upon them and never die.
3. HELL IS THE PLACE WHERE THERE ARE LEVELS OR DEGREES OF TORMENT – All face intense and unending pain. Some will face far greater.

HEBREWS 10:28-29 – Says the writer of Hebrews. “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Heb. 10:28-29).

Those who willfully reject Jesus Christ and trample, as it were, on the sacrifice He made for them with His own blood will receive much greater punishment than those who had only the light of the Old Covenant. And on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the pagan materialistic cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom than for the Jewish cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum-who not only had the light of the Old Covenant but the opportunity to see and hear the Son of God in person and to witness His miraculous works (Matt. 11:22-23).

In the parable of the slaves who awaited their master's return from the wedding feast, Jesus explains that “that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of flogging, will receive but few” (Luke 12:47-48).

“Hell will have such severe degrees,” writes John Gretna, “that a sinner, were he able, would give the whole world if his sins could be one less.”

The torment of hell will be everlasting. Nothing will be so horrible about hell as its endlessness. Jesus uses the same word to describe the duration of hell as the duration

of heaven: "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). People in hell will experience the absence of hope.

THE ARGUMENT FROM THE INFINITE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST (C. H. Macintosh)

"If anything less than eternal punishment be due to sin, what need was there of an infinite sacrifice to give deliverance from that punishment? Did Jesus shed His precious blood to deliver us from the consequences of our guilt, if those consequences be only temporary? Grant us the truth of an infinite sacrifice, and we argue from thence the truth of eternal punishment."