

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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# THE RETURN OF CHRIST

ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, AT SOME point in the future Christ will return to earth, time will end, and creation will be complete. In addition to the certainty of this affirmation of faith, Jesus Christ himself taught that it is impossible to know or predict when the end will come. The unpredictability of the future represents a subtle subtheme of the Christian faith which nevertheless affirms a certain outcome to time, space, and history.

People function on a day-to-day basis by relying on the patterns of previous experience, as Solomon wrote:

Generations come and generations go,  
but the earth remains forever.

The sun rises and the sun sets,  
and hurries back to where it rises

(Eccles. 1:4–5).

Past experience, however, provides no assurance of the future. The expectation that tomorrow will come may have less to do with faith than with the numb assumption or taking for granted of past experience. James, the half brother of Jesus, warned against taking future prosperity for granted: “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are mist a that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that’” (James 4:13–15).

The Bible assumes the uncertainty or unpredictability of life, despite the many patterns that we take for granted. Yet, the Bible

also assumes that God has complete and effortless authority within the unpredictability to affect outcomes.

### **The Involvement of God**

How is God involved in human affairs? God created the physical world in such a way that it is open and indeterminate while at the same time possessing qualities of regularity that give it a determinate character. God has the freedom to interact with the physical world while in no way disrupting the orderly regularity of his established processes. In the same way, God provided people with a spiritual dimension of sufficient complexity that it is described as the image of God. This spiritual dimension of human life provides people with freedom to act while at the same time providing God with the opening to interact. The fallen human spirit is itself a highly complex chaos system.

God's involvement with people occurs as interpersonal interaction. Communication which involves a degree of understanding occurs. The Bible does not present a static view of how this communication takes place nor of the degree of understanding that goes with it. The Book of Hebrews begins by alluding to the variety of ways revelation has occurred. The writing of the Ten Commandments on stone represented a far more precise communication of content with intellectual understanding than Peter's vision of a sheet full of unclean animals coming down from heaven (Acts 10:9–35). Peter's understanding of the vision came later in the course of life's circumstances. Even less graphic are the daily interactions of God with people in terms of basic decision making, assurance, and understanding.

All through the Bible, God works with people. Some respond, like Moses. Some do not, like Pharaoh. Some are molded over time, like Jacob, David, or Peter. God's manner of interacting with individuals over time, as with Abraham, or with groups of people over generations, as with Israel, illustrates a patience out of which God slowly weaves a fabric.

The Book of Revelation describes the culmination of God's plan. Yet, the culmination is unpredictable. No one will expect it when it comes. While Revelation devotes the greatest attention to the subject of the end of time found in the Bible, the theme occurs throughout the New Testament as well as in many of the prophets. The overall sense of the end appears to be distinct from



a predictable natural phenomenon of the physical universe. It will not happen in the normal order of things. Of this unpredictability, Jesus said: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:36–39).

The beginning and the end represent singular happenings that have no basis for prediction. They represent nonrepeatable events. Nonrepeatable events do not offer the opportunity for observation that forms the basis for theory, experimentation, verification, and final grounds for prediction. The certainty of the assertion of the end of time at the second coming of Christ implies a determinate system, yet the unpredictability of the second coming and the end of time implies an indeterminate system. Can these two mutually exclusive ideas both be valid? It resembles the half-life of radioactive iodine. The scientist may know that something will suddenly disappear, but he or she has no idea precisely when it will happen.

In the beginning of creation, Genesis describes a situation of chaos. The description has a threefold emphasis: the earth was formless and void, darkness covered the deep, and this state was described as "the waters." The Hebrew phrase *tohu wavohu*, which is translated into English as "formless and void," represents the equivalent of the Greek *chaos*. The idea of darkness represents a spiritual concept throughout the Bible which stands at odds with God's will and purpose. Likewise, "the waters" represent the physical embodiment of chaos and darkness in the Hebrew worldview. Creation occurs when God moves upon the face of this chaotic situation (Gen. 1:2). In creation, God does something *to* and *with* the chaos. God takes the chaos and says, "Let there be light." Out of the chaos the light appears.

The swirling, churning currents of water, especially vast expanses of water, continue to represent the chaotic void throughout Scripture, and God continually exercises authority over the chaos. The flood marks a return to the beginning as God removes the separation of the waters above and the waters below, as God removes the separation between the seas and the dry land, as the

deep swallows all of creation. The chaos responds as the Spirit of God moves it. Then God separates the waters below and the waters above once again, and once again God causes the dry land to appear. God has the freedom to act with certainty, predictability, and purpose in the chaos because the chaos has no certainty, predictability, or purpose of its own. It may go one way as well as another.

The flight of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt ended abruptly at the Red Sea. The ancient watery fear blocked the way of escape. All the ancient Hebrew dreads of the vast water as the place of death seemed fulfilled until God repeated once again the separation of the waters from the dry land. Like the chorus of a great hymn, the theme repeats itself again—God has authority over the chaos. God actually uses the chaos to accomplish his purpose.

The ancients worshiped the dreaded, fearful Deep in the form of Tiamet, Dagon, Poseidon, and Neptune. The ability of God to rescue Jonah from the deep, from the clutches of chaos, provides a basis for faith and hope in a God who can bring the most disastrous of situations to a satisfactory resolution. Ultimately, the faith in God to which the Bible bears witness is often a faith in spite of the unpredictable and disastrous situations of life. It is a faith in the ultimate certainty that God takes the chaos and moves it toward an end in keeping with his will. This final end will benefit people regardless of how the chaos along the way may have affected them. In reflecting on this idea, the apostle Paul observed: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). God does not keep people from the chaos, because the chaos itself is the stuff of life. Rather, God works in the midst of the chaos.

Recalling God's authority over the waters, Jesus Christ dramatically signified his identification with God by his authority over water. His first miracle involved changing water into wine. More reminiscent of the deep, however, Jesus calmed the stormy sea and walked upon the waters. Any one of these stories would be quite unbelievable, but they demonstrate the continuing authority that God exercises over the chaos. The episodes of authority over water provide a symbolic link with creation and the Hebrew dread of the sea. Other demonstrations of authority by Jesus illustrate this same utilization of chaos. Whether social systems or human body systems, Jesus acts to bring wholeness or healing.



A quantum universe made up of chaotic systems is wide open to the involvement of God. One might say that chaos suggests an openness to the intervention of God, but the notion of intervention suggests that God is not already intimately involved in the orderly processes at work in the midst of the chaos. Rather than intervention, a universe made up of chaotic systems seems tailor-made for continual involvement.

### Moving Toward the Finale

While God has the freedom to act upon chaos without doing damage to the principles or the forces at work that were established to provide order to the universe, a sovereign God also has the freedom not to act. God has the freedom to let matters take their own course. Sovereignty means that God has as much freedom not to determine events as to determine them. Thus, the author of Hebrews observes, "Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him" (Heb. 2:8c).

If God is involved in the universe and has the power to determine events, then why does he allow bad things to happen? This question in theology is referred to as *theodicy*, or the problem of evil. The Bible suggests a variety of answers to the question, beginning with punishment. Bad things happen to people as a result of the judgment of God. Examples of this experience appear in Scripture from the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to the Babylonian Captivity. Yet, the Bible also provides examples of bad things happening to innocent people like Job. In some cases, bad things happen as the result of satanic attack. Bad things also happen for which the Bible gives no explanation; such as the Galileans whose blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifice or the eighteen people who died when the tower of Siloam fell on them (Luke 13:1–4).

In a deterministic universe, one would expect a single answer for all situations of suffering or evil. Suffering would be predictable and easily explained. In a chaotic universe, however, variable situations suggest multiple explanations for bad experiences. The presence of suffering in different situations may have different reasons or no reason. If God does not act, then reason and purpose vanish.

Both physical and social chaos systems lead to disaster. The physical order breeds earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, tidal waves, landslides, drought, fire, blizzards, pestilence, and supernovas. The social order fosters envy, jealousy,

arrogance, theft, deceit, lies, violence, murder, bigotry, hatred, indifference, selfishness, and war. Suffering occurs in the context of the indeterminacy of chaotic systems for a variety of reasons. Jesus explained that the occurrence of earthquakes, wars, and rumors of wars would not constitute a sign of the end; rather, these situations are a feature of life.

God waited four hundred years to release the Hebrew slaves from their bondage in Egypt. Why the wait? They surely experienced suffering. The question of when God acts takes on as much importance as what God does in terms of suffering. Does it suggest a limited ability to act? Different theological traditions have staked out different positions on this spectrum of thought. Although the positions are quite different and frequently contradictory, the motive for the position is strikingly similar. Reformed theology holds that God determines every event that occurs, however small or large, in order to uphold God's sovereignty. The motive is to defend God from the assertion that he is less than all-powerful.

Some theological approaches today represented by such books as *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold Kushner (from a Jewish perspective) and *A Scandalous Providence* by Frank Tupper (from a Christian perspective) hold that many events lie outside God's control or power to act, in order to uphold God's love. The motive is to defend God from the charge that God is not good for allowing bad things to happen. Both are defensive theologies designed to protect God's reputation. Both are based on the idea that a standard exists for judging God such that if he does not determine each event he is not sovereign and if he does not prevent all suffering he is not a loving, compassionate God. This higher standard that undergirds the theology comes from the theologian's philosophical perspective. The philosophy, in turn, is developed against the backdrop of a number of unspoken and unrecognized emotional considerations. Thus, theology itself represents a chaos system capable of distorting revelation itself.

Theological traditions also differ on whether an end of time determined by God will occur at all. Some non-Christian theological traditions strongly emphasize an end of time and a divine reckoning. In Hinduism it will occur when Kali dances the final dance of destruction and Shiva the Destroyer appears to destroy all. In Islam the end will come when Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed appear to judge the world. In classical Judaism it will occur at the



appearing of the Son of Man in glory. In classical Christianity it will occur at the second coming of Christ. Within Buddhism and some forms of Hinduism, however, the end is a personal matter along with judgment. Judgment is a process that occurs over and over through thousands of successive lives which are judged imperfect unless in one reincarnation a person finally attains the end of perfection—bliss, *nirvana*. In the nature religions, these questions do not play a central role. Instead, the focus is on the cycles of nature with the concern resting on how one can best prosper now. The moral/ethical, meaning/destiny questions give way to physical survival concerns.

In Christian theology, the study of the end of time is referred to as *eschatology*. Theologians will often speak of the end of time as the *eschaton*, which is the Greek word for “the end.” Within the Christian tradition, several views of the second coming of Christ have appeared over and over again. The Book of Revelation refers to a one-thousand-year reign of Christ on earth which is known as the *millennium* or the *millennial reign*. The major views within classical Christian thought of the timing of the second coming relate to the millennium. Those who believe Christ will come before the millennium to establish his kingdom are referred to as *premillennialists*. Those who believe that Christ will come after Christians have established the godly society with Christ reigning through them are referred to as *postmillennialists*. Those who believe the millennium of Revelation is a metaphor for a spiritual reality, but that there will be no literal one-thousand-year kingdom on earth are referred to as *amillennialists*.

### Philosophical Approaches

Apart from these approaches to interpretation of Scripture within classical Christianity, several attempts have developed in recent years to make God and progress compatible with naturalism. The most prominent of these approaches is *process theology*, which identifies God with the natural processes of nature which lead to complexity, especially as they relate to life. Process theology stands on the shoulders of *neoorthodox theology*, which accepted the presuppositions of naturalism but tried to make a case for classical Christianity without cognitive revelation (Barth) or miracle (Bultmann). Because naturalism has no place for the influence or involvement of God in the natural order, neoorthodoxy sought to make religion a matter of personal opinion rather than objective

reality. The naturalist lost all grounds for objection to Christianity if Christians did not make truth claims. The Bible was not represented by neoorthodoxy to be revelation from God. Instead, it was a collection of testimonies of personal experiences of those who had revelatory experiences with God. Though Jesus Christ was held to be the highest revelation of God, knowledge of Christ came only through documents regarded as personal opinion. The Bible no longer held any higher authority than any other religious writings.

In the twentieth century, Christian theology has tended either to ignore science altogether or to use science as the basis for developing a theology. Karl Barth represents that camp of mainline Protestantism that believed general revelation or nature could tell us nothing about God. Another tradition, however, took the functional view that specific revelation does not occur as traditionally understood; therefore, an understanding of nature provides our only rational or reflective understanding of God. This tradition would generally include personal experience within the realm of nature.

*Process theology* builds a view of God and nature that no longer requires the same level of attention and reference to the Bible which neoorthodoxy followed. Process theology represents a philosophical approach to recognizing the existence of some kind of transcendent being within a naturalistic universe. Those process theologians who carry this line of thought to its natural conclusions identify God with the naturalistic process itself. God is mind, which actualizes itself in the process of nature. Nature has no fixed future. Thus, process theology allows for a deterministic process and an indeterminate mind behind the process. Process theology represents a departure from classical orthodox Christianity in that it is strongly influenced by evolutionary theory. Some of the major figures who have contributed to this stream of thought would not consider themselves Christian, though some have done their work within the structures of Christianity. A brief survey of several key process thinkers will serve to demonstrate how a philosophically based religion might develop from science.

### Teilhard de Chardin

Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) was a French Jesuit priest as well as an accomplished paleontologist. In his most important book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard propounded a theology of human evolution. His ideas are included in this chapter, however,



because he based his theology on the point toward which people are evolving. He called this end point *Omega Point*. Thus, Teilhard used evolution to create a metaphysical system that explained the goal of the cosmos.

Teilhard argued that matter/energy is the ground of the universe. Man is a part of this matter/energy as a physical reality. As matter/energy becomes more complex, man appears. If at the end of this process of *complexification* there is mental energy as well as physical energy, then perhaps mental energy was there all along. Teilhard argued that at the beginning of the process of complexification, mental energy is already present as latent human spirit.

Teilhard described three major realms of complexification, or the upward drive of the organism. The basic physical realm he labeled the *cosmosphere*. A supersaturation of complexification at this level leads to a change of state, like hot water that suddenly becomes steam. This change of state in the purely physical leads to the next level that he called the *biosphere*. The biosphere is the realm of life. Supersaturation of complexification at this level leads to human life which belongs to the next level which Teilhard called the *noosphere*. Teilhard argued that complexification ended at the physical level with *cerebralisation* or the centralization of the nervous system. From the noosphere to Omega Point, complexification involves the development of the social dimension. Under the pressure of overpopulation, the noosphere will result in either totalitarianism or a society of mutual love. At Omega Point, energy takes the form of love. In this approach, *mind* is called physical energy at the lower level. This identification of mind and matter reverses the dichotomy that Descartes saw between these two.

### William Temple

A theologian and later archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple (1881–1944) began his career as an advocate of *Hegelianism*. Hegel had regarded the universe as one mind thinking. The one mind moves itself through history, seeking self-realization. It begins in emptiness and moves dialectically. *Dialectic* involves a thesis which is countered by an antithesis which resolves into synthesis. The synthesis becomes the new thesis. All nature and history is God arguing with himself. As a dialectic process, God is a growing God. Temple never escaped the dialectic method. When confronted by communism which also utilized Hegel's dialectic method, Temple saw the need to develop a response that made room for God

in the dialectic process. *Dialectical realism* represents Temple's response to the materialistic dialectic of Karl Marx.

Temple's dialectic begins with the process of evolution but operates in the area of *mind*. (1) The smallest organism is unaware and only moved by its environment. (2) The more complex life form has consciousness and self-motion. It has movement within nature and awareness of nature. It adjusts to its environment. (3) People have self-consciousness in addition to self-motion. People have the ability to adjust the environment to suit them. Temple argues that as mind becomes increasingly apparent and present in nature, nature becomes increasingly inexplicable, except with reference to mind. Behind the physical evolutionary process lies a mind that directs and guides the process toward a goal.

### Alfred North Whitehead

Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) was a mathematician who took up philosophy after retirement. Though he was not a Christian, Whitehead had a significant influence on Christian philosophers and others interested in the relationship of science and religion.

Whitehead employed an organic model for the universe. The basis of response of an organism to environment is feeling, even at the unconscious level. Prehension is the lowest level of feeling, and it exists in a state of unconsciousness. An actual entity has a fleeting existence. An actual event is a dynamic series which takes time to realize itself or attain *satisfaction*. The physical pole of an entity canprehend another entity when it achieves satisfaction. An actual entity attains eternal objectivity when satisfaction occurs, but once satisfaction occurs, the entity perishes. The enduring object is a nexus of beads of actual occasions. Temporal and spatial nexuses are held together by prehension.

The mental pole prehends the subjective aims. Subjective aims do not come from within but from God. God is the principle that distributes subjective aims and gives direction. This does not imply that God created the process, because creativity is within the process and God is the first creation of the process. God is an enduring actual occasion which is inconsistent with the system. All actual entities are God's memories. Man's objective immortality involves enduring in the memory of God, who carries the memory of us to his satisfaction. This system allows no place for transcendence.



## W. E. Hocking

W. E. Hocking (1873–1964) accepted all religions as equal. He was a realist because of his understanding of nature. The natural order made possible the encounter of finite minds with one another and with *Other Mind*. Nature is objective, not a creation of the mind. Minds come out of nature and are a part of the natural process. Despite their finitude, people are able to communicate and have fellowship. People encounter one another in nature on the physical periphery of their being. Hocking believed that people know one another by intuiting a pattern. Body and activity are outward manifestations of being, and revelation comes through the body.

Hocking was an ontologist who believed that in our own self-transcendence, people find God. When nature is investigated, it takes on an aspect of *Other Mind*. If something in nature is objective and parallel to my mind, then I am encountering *Other Mind*. God meets people in the world where they live and in the depths of their own self-awareness.

## Charles Hartshorne

Charles Hartshorne (1897– ) taught at Harvard with Whitehead. He believed that reality is bound together by feeling. The universe is made up of psychic entities characterized by feeling. He saw these *societies* at different levels: spatial, temporal, and temporal/spatial. Societies may be democratic (a heap of sand—inanimate) or monarchical (where one aspect orders the whole—animate). Upon moving beyond the plant level, the wholes of the monarchical level show themselves. A changing individual must have a persisting factor. A changing whole needs only one factor to change for the whole to be changed.

The accident of becoming comes from God's involvement in the world. God's essence is love. Accident enriches God's life as he fulfills his purpose, but this does not alter his essence of love. Because of God's involvement with his creatures, he can be said to suffer. God does not set down objective goals but constrains the world by his love. Applying the analogy of society, the universe must be monarchical; otherwise, there would be no order. In Hartshorne's universe, God does not know what will happen, but he knows the possibilities.

This progression away from classical Christian faith with all its rich diversity illustrates how one's philosophical presuppositions

can result in a theological system that distorts revelation itself. These attitudes, which relate to basic presuppositions about knowledge and the superiority of scientific knowledge over revelation, are based largely on “old science.” They emerge from a static, deterministic understanding of science, and they confuse the disciplined method of science with the philosophical presuppositions of naturalism.

### Philosophical Views of History

The Bible presents a view of history with a beginning and an end. Philosophy would describe this kind of view as *linear history*. Among historians, a *historic period* would refer only to a period that left written records. Old Testament scholars will sometimes say that Abraham was not a historical figure. Within this technical definition used by scholars, the statement means that Abraham left no written records, nor did his contemporaries write about him. This does not mean that Abraham did not live or that the account of him in Genesis is not true. It means that the story of Abraham was preserved orally from generation to generation rather than in writing. God instructed the people of Israel to use this same method of transmission to keep the story of the Passover alive, and it continues to this day in Jewish families. Nonetheless, many historians will not accept as historical a figure who has no contemporary written record. This represents an area where history seeks to have a basis for certainty that corresponds to the scientific method.

Philosophers, on the other hand, view history in an entirely different way. Philosophers of history focus on the meaning or meaningfulness of history beyond the mere historical record. The historical record may be the least reliable source for understanding from the perspective of the philosopher. The old adage “The victor writes the history” suggests that people are not always objective in their accounts of themselves. The Bible—written over centuries, across many cultures, from the perspective of both victor and conquered peoples alike—presents a meaning to history. It presents this meaning not only in terms of what it says about events, but also in terms of the framework: a beginning and an end. History has a movement or direction to it, like a journey. It has an aspiration to it: a promised land, future generations, a coming kingdom, a time of peace. It has a sense of the contribution and foundation of the past and a future expectation of hope in which the present moment plays a vital role in what will come to pass. The end is certain, but



what happens between the present and the end is not known; therefore, present behavior, attitudes, and thoughts matter.

This *linear view* of history is not the only linear view of history. Karl Marx developed a linear view based on the economic struggle of the workers against their masters which would eventually lead to a perfect, materialistic workers' state. This linear view is the philosophy of history imbedded in communism.

Another philosophical view is *cyclical view*. The cyclical view of history regards history as an ever-repeating story. This view often appears in nature religions where life involves endless cycles of seasons, planets, births, and especially reincarnations. Philosophers of history, such as Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West* and Arnold Toynbee in *A Story of History* seek to detect patterns to explain the rise and decline of civilizations. The presence of patterns, however, does not require a cyclical view of history.

Within the linear view of history presented by the biblical writers, one also finds patterns. The patterns, however, should not be understood as cycles. Cycles suggest a regular, inevitable rhythm, like the beating of the heart, the passage of the seasons, the phases of the moon. A cycle has a deterministic element to it. Solomon discusses the patterns of life in Ecclesiastes. The sun rises and sets, but there is nothing new under the sun. Life is full of episodes: living, dying, laughing, crying (Eccles. 3:1-8). Solomon calls the patterns of life meaningless by themselves. They are all vanity. They are the patterns of chaos. The same elements may be seen over and over again, but in no particular order or duration.

Just as individual lives contain many of the same elements or patterns, the Bible explores the patterns for societies. Kingdoms may suffer the same fate, but these common experiences do not occur as an inevitable natural process or cycle. They occur because of human decision and divine judgment. The judgment, however, is not a detached judgment. The judgment provides a basis for making a fresh start, but the involvement of God in personal lives and social structures occurs to prevent the personal and social collapse that results from detachment from God. Spiritual renewal and the rejuvenation of societies represent unexpected features of history that stands at odds with the cyclical view.

In the midst of the chaos, new life emerges. At the personal level, regeneration occurs when God moves upon the chaos of a personal situation and something unexpected and unpredictable

results. A person encounters God and is changed. He or she can never be the same person again. He may repeat old habits, but his perspective has changed. Once a person knows the world is round, it changes his or her perspective. God moves upon the chaos of entire societies as well. These periods of revival or awakening cannot be predicted. People like Charles Finney have attempted to classify the "laws" of revival to give such experiences the legitimacy of the scientific method, but they defy such regularity. People have also attempted to standardize the form that personal conversion takes, but conversion defies such a mechanical understanding. In revival, just as in conversion, people respond to the impulse of the movement of the Spirit of God. Not everyone responds. Perhaps very few respond.

Any consideration of the presence of suffering and evil in the world created by a good God must begin with a consideration of creation itself. The question does not begin with why there is suffering in the world but why there is any world in which to feel anything. What is the purpose of creation? If the image of God is essentially the spiritual aspect of people, then why would God begin by making people physical? Physical experience in its totality has something to contribute to life.

From the perspective of eternity, the period of human suffering is incalculably small. From the perspective of human suffering, however, eternity is a very long way away. Yet God does not seem to have physical prosperity and comfort as the goal of creation. For fallen humanity, comfort and luxury tend to make God more remote and less attractive. In the presence of suffering, however, when people lose their health, the people they love, their reputations, their possessions, or anything else dear to them, they become open to seeing God. The chaos provides the openness for discerning the presence of God.

The Bible never suggests that suffering, evil, pain, and distress are good. Instead, the Bible indicates that the sudden, unpredictable end is the means God has chosen to bring an end to suffering and pain, once and for all. In the meantime, death itself provides the door from this world to the next. That death will come is a certainty, barring the return of Christ; yet, it is an unpredictable event.