

Economic Crisis

THE CRISIS

Jim and Sharon were young and in love. Married in 2004, they hurried to purchase a home in 2005 and later that year welcomed a delightful baby girl. Life was good and getting better until the economy began to falter. At first, the situation seemed survivable but when the stock market melted in October 2008, reality set in. Along with other Americans, they saw their dreams and saving evaporate overnight.

The whole ordeal felt like a fist in the stomach. Gloomy and ashen faced, their skimpy 401(k) offered little solace. Nor did their mortgage, now worth more than their home. And to make matters worse, Jim's company was cutting back. How long would he have his job? Suddenly, sleepless nights found him pacing the floor, working on numbers, trying to devise a plan for his family. The sour economy was becoming a nightmare.

Sadly enough, their dramatic reversal of fortune is a familiar tale today. No one has gone untouched as America has stumbled into the worst financial predicament in recent memory. And for most people, it is small consolation that the economy is bruising everyone. From sea to shining sea, anxiety is beginning to chip away at the most precious commodity of all—old American optimism.

So how did we get here? Though the factors are numerous, a short list would include lax lending standards, poor regulation, and greed. A few naysayers saw the approaching train but average Americans were completely blindsided. In the aftermath, 20/20 hindsight helps us see the dangers of a house too big or a car too costly. Too late, we realized the perils of debt and the virtues of spending less than you earn.

It's a sad state of affairs that has people shaking their heads and wondering, Is this crisis the end of the world? It's a fair question, and one that was also posed by Jesus' disciples. When they asked Him about the end of the age, He responded by saying, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven" (Matthew 24:36, NIV). But in the same chapter, He hastens to add that we can know when His return is near. Even though no one can predict the moment of His return, He makes it clear that wars, famines, earthquakes, and persecution will escalate as the end approaches.

THE CONSPIRACY

Mounting tragedies in the world fulfill this particular prophecy, but the drama is just beginning. Events at the dawn of the new millennium have set us on a path to the ultimate showdown between good and evil. Not many years ago, an attack on the contiguous 48 would have been unthinkable, but 9/11 shattered that delusion.

Reeling from the security breach, Americans accepted diminished civil liberties in exchange for the promise of increased safety. Fast-forward a few years and the threat of economic catastrophe has paved the way for unprecedented control in the private sector. Again, unthinkable. So what's going on? Upon closer examination the common denominator, it seems, is the willingness of human nature to make any sacrifice, even freedom itself, in order to guarantee survival. And in the final struggle for survival, the Bible describes an urgent time when a world power that "no man [can] buy or sell" (Revelation 13:17, KJV) without its approval. Hard to believe? Of course it is, but if we've learned anything at all, we've learned to expect the unexpected.

If this scenario sounds like a conspiracy theory, then you're right, it is. But the conspiracy is not about money. It's about your heart. Two supernatural powers are battling for your affections. They covet your devotion, allegiance, and worship. In one corner, Satan is willing to secure these any way he can.

In the opposite corner, Jesus Christ leaves the choice to you. Satan will use earthly powers to force your hand, while Jesus can only accept a decision compelled by love. What is important to notice is that any use of force to coerce your conscience is not a plan from God. It is a plan from Satan. The clever conspirator will use the economy to mask his goal of coercion. His awful scheme is to place people in such dire circumstances that in the interest of earthly security they will abandon regard for the Word of God and offer worship and allegiance to a false earthly power.*

THE CHOICE

This amazing plot will prove the ruin of many, but there is a hope for all. Just a few verses later, hard on the heels of the economic decree in Revelation 13, comes an appeal to worship the God of the universe. In quick succession, three angels make loud announcements to the citizens of planet Earth. The first angel of Revelation 14 distinctly calls people to worship God. "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Revelation 14:6, 7, NKJV). This appeal is immediately followed by a warning that those who ignore this invitation will suffer destruction with the false earthly power. "If anyone worships the beast and his image . . . he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is pored out full strength in the cup of His indignation" (verses 9, 10, NKJV).

As the incredible drama unfolds, truth becomes unmistakable. The world arrives at a crossroads with eternal consequences. There can be no doubt about the message. Everyone will make a choice—a choice for God or a choice for self-preservation. Some will follow the path of least resistance and say, "I choose to buy and sell, even if it means breaking God's commandments." But others gladly respond, "I choose to trust God completely, knowing that He will supply all of my needs. By His power, I will keep the Ten Commandments." These loyal people are described as "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (verse 12, NKJV). Which side will you choose today?

