

ASSOCIATED BIBLE STUDENTS

"WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING." PSALMS 30:5

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS! When Prophetic Expectations Outweigh the Facts

World-wide media attention recently focused on a community of Christians who prophesied that *the rapture* would occur on May 21st, 2011, followed by horrific scenes of global destruction. Now that May 21st has come and gone, it is apparent to all that this prediction was incorrect. But even if most Christians don't set a date, they still hold the belief that the Judgment Day will be a most dreadful time. These claim that all Christians will be swept up to heaven in an instant, while those who remain will be subjected to a period of shame and torment upon the earth, ending with the annihilation of the world by fire. Is there any substance to these alarming predictions about the destiny of earth and its non-Christian inhabitants?

SCRIPTURE TESTIMONY REASONABLE

When the Scriptures are studied topically and in context, they indicate something very different than this dismal view. The prophet Haggai declares that in the Judgment Day "*the desire of all nations shall come!*" (Haggai 2:7) John the Revelator stated of this day that it would be a time for "*the healing of the nations.*" (Revelation 22:2) Isaiah portrayed a wonderful time when "*none shall hurt nor destroy*" in all God's holy mountain: for the earth shall then "*be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*" (Isaiah 11:9) How do we reconcile these and many other scriptures which paint a very different and beautiful picture of the Day of Judgment, versus one of dread and torment for earth's billions?

Reasoning on the Scriptures, it becomes apparent that there are several popular misconceptions regarding the purpose of the Lord's return and the Judgment Day. Just what do the Scriptures say?



1. THE JUDGMENT DAY: 24 Hours or 1,000 Years?

The term *judgment* (Greek, *krisis*) as defined in Scripture signifies more than merely the rendering of a verdict—it also includes a *period of a trial*. The term *day*, both in the Scriptures and in common usage, often signifies a span of time greater than 24 hours, such as Noah's *day* or Jesus' *day*. "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day... and was glad.*" (John 8:56) Of this *Day of Judgment*, 2 Peter 3:8 states: "*...be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years...*" Hence, the Day of Judgment applies to the

thousand-year Millennial Age. This is the same time period when Satan will be bound for a thousand years "*to deceive the nations no more.*" (Revelation 20:1-3) It is the same thousand years that Christ and his Bride, the Church, will rule over and bless the "*poor groaning creation.*" "*For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.*" (Romans 8:19 NAS) In this thousand-year day of God's Kingdom, when it is fully established upon earth, mankind will gratefully say: "*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*" Isaiah 25:9

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE JUDGMENT DAY: To Destroy or to Teach?

Isaiah foretells of the purpose of this Judgment Day: "*for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*" (Isaiah 26:9) The Apostle Paul assures us that the Day of Judgment will be a glorious and desirable day. "*He hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness...*" (Acts 17:31) Hence, this day of the Lord will be a time

of instruction in righteousness for earth's billions who have never had a fair opportunity to hear of the Word of truth and see the plan of salvation.

Compared to what is generally preached today, how differently the prophets and apostles have regarded the purpose of that promised Day of Judgment. Consider the exultant prophetic utterance of David: *"Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice: and let men say among the nations, the Lord reigneth.... let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein. Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the Lord, because he cometh to judge the earth. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever."* (1 Chronicles 16:31-34) Note here that the Judgment Day is associated with the *goodness* and *mercy* of God. For a world which has been burdened with over six thousand years of sin and death, this exclamation of the coming judgment upon the earth is certainly a day to look forward to.



3. EARTH DESTROYED: Literal or Symbolic Fire?

In this time of great prophetic expectation, the expression *end of the world* is frequently used by Christians and has been associated with the complete destruction of the planet. However, this gloomy prospect is the result of a misleading Bible translation which should more accurately read *end of the age* and not *end of the world*. (See Matthew 24:3, Rotherham: *"the conclusion of the age."*) This thought harmonizes with the Apostle Peter's historic review of Noah's day when he explained that *"the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."* (2 Peter 3:6) Obviously, it was not the literal world which came to an end—merely a ceasing of that order or condition of things which prevailed on the earth prior to the time of the flood. The end of the corrupt world of Noah's day then gave mankind a fresh start. This harmonizes with God's promise in Genesis 8:21: *"I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done."* Similarly, the ending of this present old world means the opening of the *"new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."* (2 Peter 3:13) Then, under Christ's reign, and with Satan bound, most of the world's inhabitants will have their first real chance at success as they endeavor to walk up the *"highway of holiness."* (Isaiah 35:8) Yes, ages may end and be succeeded by other ages, but the Bible declares that *"the earth abideth forever."* Ecclesiastes 1:4

But, some may say, since Zephaniah 3:8 states that *"... all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy,"*

does this not indicate that the earth will be burned up? No, because *fire* in this scripture cannot be taken literally, for the context in verse 9 concludes with the promise that God *"will turn to the people a pure language that they may all... serve Him with one consent."* As a further confirmation that *fire* is usually symbolic, review 2 Peter 3:10 which reads: *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."* If taken literally, these words contradict that *"the earth abideth forever."* A literal interpretation would also present a significant problem if the literal heavens, where Christ, his Church and the angels abide, pass away and melt with fervent heat. The symbolism of fire, here again, represents the destruction of the elements of the old earthly systems under the reign of Satan and his minions: the present ecclesiastical heavens and political-social systems of earth. God declares: *"The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool,"* and *"I will make the place of my feet glorious."* (Isaiah 66:1; 60:13)

How glorious would the earth be if literally burned up?

4. ARMAGEDDON: Is There a Constructive Purpose?

The Scriptures do speak of the *battle of Armageddon*—a momentous *time of trouble* coinciding with the final collapse of this old order. (Revelation 16:16; Daniel 12:1) However, the true purpose of Armageddon is, as stated above, to *cleanse* the earth of the systems of corruption which have been under the control of Satan and his servants. The revolutions, wars and anarchy among all nations that constitute this *great time of trouble* will be the ultimate lesson of man's inability to govern righteously.

It is important to understand that all corrupt ecclesiastical and civil systems need to be destroyed—not the ignorant people misled by these systems. *"Every valley [the poor, oppressed, suffering world of mankind] shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill [proud and oppressive systems of this world] shall be made low..."* (Isaiah 40:4) Selfish human *institutions* are to be destroyed forever, not the billions of good-hearted people, just because they have not known and accepted Jesus now.

5. SALVATION: Is Now the Only Time?

Most Christians are taught that now is the only time for salvation. However, ever since Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, his children have been plagued by sin and sorrow and most have never really had a chance to learn the *good news*. God saw that, through inherited weakness and the influence of Satan, the majority of mankind would not be capable of

responding to His counsels. But the fact is that Jesus Christ “tasted death for every man” and provided “a ransom for all to be testified in due time.” (Hebrews 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:6) Christ himself stated that this present age is not the *due time* for the majority when he declared that the Bible was purposely written in *parables and symbols* so that the majority would not be converted at this time. “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without all these things are done in parables. That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.” (Mark 4:11-12) If now is the only time for all to be converted, we would ask, why did Jesus not give a clear message so that *all* could have an *equal* opportunity to understand his words of salvation?

The reality is that now is the time for the selection of a few with *ears to hear*—the Church. After this nighttime of sorrow, all others will come forth from their graves ready to *hear*, seeking the full knowledge of the Lord. With Satan bound, they will have *for the first time* a reasonable opportunity to be brought to perfection and everlasting life. Jeremiah 31:34 says of that time, “. . . for they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest.” Verse 29 also shows that, for the majority of mankind, the kingdom will provide the first full, fair opportunity for salvation through the knowledge of Christ. They will no longer die for the inherited sins of their fathers but, if they refuse God’s generous mercy during the reign of righteousness, they will then *die for their own iniquity*. (Jeremiah 31:29, 30) By the end of this powerful lesson, every reformed sinner will have the law of God written in his heart. Jeremiah 31:33

6. Christ’s Return: What is the Real Purpose?

Yes, it is a misunderstanding of scriptural testimony to think that now is the time to convert the world. That process will be the purpose of Christ’s reign and the grand work of the Judgment Day. It has been the *due time* for the conversion of the Church in this Gospel Age, but it will not be the *due time* for the remainder of men until Christ’s righteous reign, as stated in Acts 15:14-17. This is when Christ turns his attention to the world of mankind in general—those who have never had the mental or moral capacity to know Christ in this Gospel Age. “After this [after selecting the faithful of the Gospel Age] I will return and build again the tabernacle of David [set up the kingdom of God]... that the remainder of men might seek

after the Lord....” Again, this thousand-year Kingdom of Christ will be the first full, fair opportunity for billions to hear and believe. Yes, the *little flock* will reign along with Christ during the thousand years to bless and “judge the world in righteousness.” 1 Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 20:6; Psalm 96:13

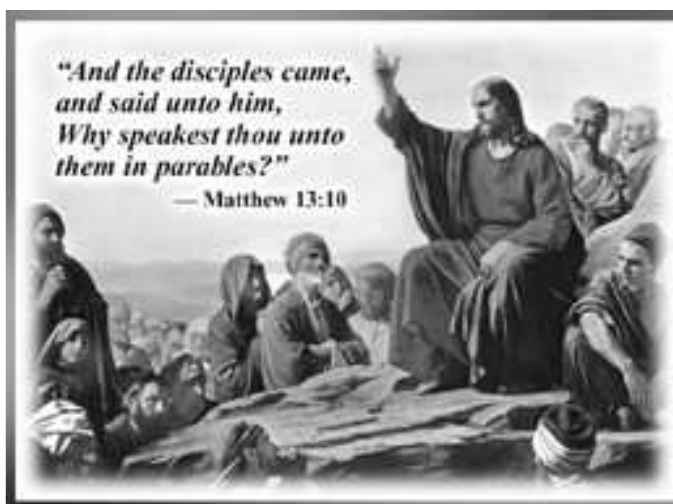
The Apostle Peter states that Jesus’ second advent brings about “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:19-21) This is a time when everything *lost* in the Garden of Eden will be *restored*—life, health, peace, equality, freedom from fear, a perfect earth, and harmony with God. (Luke 19:10; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Revelation 22:17; Isaiah 35:5-10; Psalm 72:7; Isaiah 2:4; Job 5:22,23; Jeremiah 31:34; Ephesians 1:10) It will take all of the thousand-year

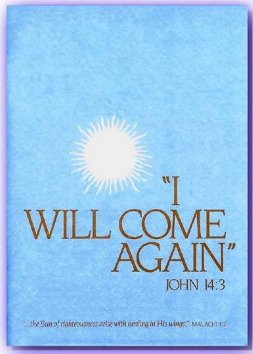
Millennial Day to complete the great work of restoring mankind to all that was lost in Adam. Then, under the benevolent thousand-year reign of Christ and his Church, “the earth shall [gradually] be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:9) Anyone who is not willing to learn righteousness, after having been given the perfect environment in which to learn, will receive the *verdict* of *second death*, and will be denied everlasting life. Acts 3:23

THE GLORIOUS ENDING OF THIS THOUSAND-YEAR JUDGMENT DAY!

God has an all-encompassing plan of rescuing and blessing all of His creation. It will soon be His *due time* for lifting the lost and dying race up from their graves and setting them upon the path of righteousness. God’s plan of the ages has been to vindicate His divine character and government, showing that the permission of evil, past and present, is educational and preparatory to the ushering of mankind into His glorious Kingdom. At that time, all the families of the earth will be blessed with a full knowledge of God and a full opportunity for attaining everlasting life through His Son—the redeemer—who then will be the great teacher, restorer and life-giver. Isaiah 9:6

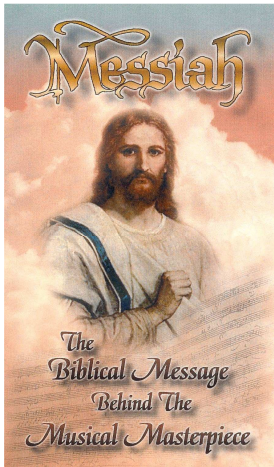
When the thousand years has ended, all things will once again be in perfect harmony with the Creator. At that time, God will have wiped away “all tears from their [the people’s] eyes.” (Revelation 21:4) Then the Lord’s prayer will be a reality: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:10





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