

WHAT IS THE END OF THE WORLD?

The subject of *the end of the world* is not a new one. It has drawn the interest of each succeeding generation, due mostly to its awesome universal application, which envisions the destruction of everything on this planet, including life itself. This subject has been preached over the centuries in a way that often instills fear and dread. Since up to the last century, the majority of people, especially in Europe, were illiterate, they had to depend on those in the pulpit for whatever information they could gather concerning this as well as all religious topics. Many clergymen had not a proper, biblical understanding of this subject.

To get a correct understanding of our topic, the end of the world, first of all, it is necessary to recognize that the Bible speaks not only of *one world* and *one end*, but of *three worlds* and *two endings*. The first *world* the Bible speaks of lasted from Adam to Noah, around 1656 years, and it ended with a universal flood. (See Gen. 7:17-24; 2 Pet. 3:6.) The second or present *world* began immediately after the Flood and will last until the return of Christ, which we believe from prophecy is in the near future, at which time this *second world* will be destroyed by fire. (2 Peter 3:7) The third *world* the scriptures speak of will begin at the time Jesus and his Church will come to establish God's Millennial Kingdom, a kingdom that will "never be destroyed." Only its first thousand years, and the little season of final testing which follows, are revealed in the Bible. (Rev. 20:1-10)

The Apostle Peter wrote about these three worlds in the scriptures cited above and also in 2 Peter 3:10-13 in the following words: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home." (NRSV)

The Bible also reveals that the first world was under the rule of angels (See Hebrews 2:5; Gen. 6:1-4; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6) that left their heavenly home. The present world is under the rule of Satan and hence it is called "the present evil world." (See 2 Cor. 4:4; Matt. 4:8, 9; John 14:30; 16:11.) The world to come will be under the direct rule of Christ and his Church. (See Psalm 2:6-9; Daniel 7:13, 14; Isaiah 11:1-5; 9:6,7; 1 Cor. 6: 2,3; 15:24-26; Rev. 19:11-16.)

Please notice that while the Bible speaks of the "*world that was*," the "*present evil world*" and the "*world to come*," it speaks of "worlds" and not *earth*. This distinction is most important in our study of our subject, for if it is not known or is ignored, it will lead to confusion. By the term *world*, the Bible refers to *the cosmos*, which means all mankind, divided into nations, institutions, organizations, societies, etc. It means the *social order of things* in general: our culture, the religious, political, financial, industrial, business, military, professional world, etc.

All of these together form the world of today, and it is the end of all these things, i.e., societies and systems, that is meant when the Bible speaks of the end of the world. It will all be destroyed in the coming great time of trouble, because this present world order is based on deceit, greed, oppression and selfishness. Once this world order, as it exists today, is destroyed, it will be replaced by a totally different and new form of order, a society which will be based on love, justice, kindness, helpfulness, righteousness and peace. Jehovah God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, will say to them, "Behold, I make

all things new" (Rev. 21:5). This is His unchangeable promise concerning the coming new world of tomorrow.

That this is the correct understanding of the term *world* is proved by the following Scriptures: "One generation passes away, and another generation comes, but *the earth abideth forever*" (Eccl. 1:4); "Thus saith the Lord, 'The heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool,'" (Isaiah 66:1); "Truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Numbers 14:21); "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9); "The Lord shall be King over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9);

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). All of these texts and many others prove, indisputably, that what was destroyed in the flood was not the earth itself, but *the corrupted civilization of that time*. Likewise, what shortly will be destroyed will

not be the earth *but the evil order of things*, to give place to a new order under the rule of a perfect King, Jesus Christ—the Prince of Peace—who with his Bride, the Church, will rule over "a new earth (society) wherein righteousness will dwell" (2 Peter 3:13).

As there was a great and terrible loss of life at the end of the first *world* or age, only eight people being saved (See Gen. 7:7; 1 Peter 3:20), there will be a great loss of life at the end of this present world, during what the Bible terms *the day of God's wrath*. The Apostle Peter describes this time in 2 Peter 3:10-12.

Though there is promised great destruction before the Lord's Kingdom is ushered in, there should be no room for fear in the hearts of those who love the Lord, for we have His assurance of care and protection throughout the great time of trouble which will envelop the whole earth. Let us not worry, fear or become discouraged for ourselves or our loved ones, for, alive or dead, we will be perfectly safe in the Mighty Hands of our great and glorious God until the promise becomes a reality of that wonderful Resurrection of all the dead, just following our Lord's Second Advent.

Having thus seen from Scripture just what it is that will be destroyed at the end of this present evil world, let us proceed further and learn what the Bible has to say about this great coming destruction. Most of the language used on this subject may or may not be symbolic, but it is also quite informative and enlightening to the student and believer of God and His Word.

Let us turn back now to 2 Peter 3:10: "But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief in the night; in 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." Perhaps this is portraying nuclear destruction, which is a distinct possibility. As we read our daily papers, we find the nations in great perplexity, not knowing how to solve their innumerable problems or which way to turn. Having fear of one another because of mutual distrust, the end result is the creation of large arsenals of intercontinental missiles and stockpiles of implements of war.

It has been said that between just two of our greatest and most powerful nations on the earth today, there are enough bombs to destroy the world seven times over. Yes, almost 2,000 years ago, the Apostle Peter, inspired by the Lord's Holy Spirit, wrote the truth about today's world conditions and what lies before us. The Lord himself said almost the same thing in Matt. 24:21, 22 and Luke 21:25, 26 (which we believe had not only an application in the Apostles' day but an even greater one in the *day of the Lord's wrath*).

Besides great tribulation in the earth, the Lord mentioned signs that shall be on the moon, sun and stars just before his return. These signs are understood to be of a symbolic nature, but it is also possible

there may be some literal fulfillment for all mankind to behold. With prophecies, we must wait and watch to see their complete fulfillment.

Other Scriptures worthy of consideration are in Daniel 2:31-35. Here the prophet Daniel first describes King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, then in verses 36-44 he gives the interpretation. Note in verses 34 and 35 the ten toes of the statue, representing present-day nations, with the *stone* cut out of the mountain destroying these kingdoms, breaking them to pieces, grinding them to dust, and blowing them away with the wind—a picture of total destruction. Then this *stone* grows and grows until it fills the entire earth. This is a wonderful illustration of God's universal Kingdom for which the Lord said we should pray, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is done in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). Often in Bible prophecy we read of various *days*, i.e., "*the day of God's wrath*," "*the day of the Lord*," "*the day of judgment*," "*the day of vengeance*," etc. These days do not refer to 24-hour periods of time, but rather to short or long periods of time, as is shown by the context.

The period of time which the Bible refers to as *the end of the world*, in which the wrath of God is made manifest in the punishing

of a sinful and godless generation, is called "*the day of wrath*" or "*the day of the Lord's vengeance*," and generally refers to a period of time when the present world passes away and a new and wonderful world is brought forth.

We find such an expression in the prophecy of Malachi 4:1: "For behold, *the day cometh* that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble: and the *day* that comes shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." This will be a period of *destruction* pictured here by a *hot burning oven*, which agrees with the prophecy of the Apostle Peter written many centuries later. Of course, those who love the Lord will have nothing to fear, because the verse that follows declares, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." This portrays the return of our Lord Jesus Christ with blessings of life and health to all the obedient of mankind.

Another prophecy of the end of the world is found in Joel 2:11: "....for *the day of the Lord* is great and very terrible; who can abide it?" This prophecy of Joel ties in with the one in Malachi, for both refer to the same event. At that time the gold, silver and all the wealth of the world will be of no value or use to help anyone. This wealth, for which men have robbed and killed for centuries, will be utterly worthless, bringing down the rich to the same level as the poor. Two prophetic texts bring this out. The first is in James 5:1-3: "*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid a treasure for the last days....*"

The other text is found in Ezekiel 7:19: "They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing; their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord; they cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity." Yes, the love of silver and gold has been, and still is today, a stumbling block to millions of people because of greed and power. The entire world's wealth will be worthless at the end times, and no one will be able to save his life because of his wealth. Only God's protection will save. Position, power and wealth will be as worthless as ashes. Fear and terror will stalk the earth, especially among those who have forsaken God and His laws. This is portrayed by the prophet Isaiah in the following words: "and the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the pride of men shall be brought low; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day...and men shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from

before the terror of the Lord and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to shake terribly the earth..." (Isaiah 2:17-21).

Notice now how the events described by James, Ezekiel and Isaiah match with those described in Revelation 6:15-17: "Then the kings (leaders) of the earth and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondsman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb: for the day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?'" Thus, the harmonious testimony of men of God was separated by centuries, but moved and inspired by the same Holy Spirit of God. Their testimony is true and their prophetic writings will be fulfilled by their Author and Inspirer—Almighty God!

A description of the terrible loss of life as coming from God in punishment against the wickedness on earth is found in Jeremiah 25:30-33: *"The Lord will roar from on high, and from His holy habitation utter His voice; He will roar mightily against His fold, and shout like those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord has an indictment against the nations; He is entering into judgment with all flesh, and the wicked He will put to the sword, says the Lord. Behold, evil is going from nation to nation, and a great tempest is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth! And those slain by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground."*

Another important prophecy of the end of this world is found in Isaiah 34:1-4: "Draw near, O nations, to hear, and harken, O peoples! Let the earth listen, and all that fills it; the world and all that comes from it. For the Lord is enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their host. He has doomed them; He has given them over for slaughter. Their slain shall be cast out and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood. All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree." Note here that heaven is included, too, in this end of the world scene, and that the host of heaven shall fall down to earth and rot away (be dissolved). Does this prophecy refer to God's literal heavens and the host of His holy angels? No! It refers to Satan and his host of fallen angels (devils and demons) who at present are restrained in the atmosphere of the earth and who can and do influence and corrupt people to do their bidding in various evil ways contrary to the will of God. At the time of our Lord's first Advent, many of these evil spirits had taken abode in the bodies of people and Jesus always expelled them. Many still enter into their victims today, leading them to do unnatural and strange things beyond reason or understanding. Before the end of the world, this host of demons will be cast down, with their leader, Satan, from the earth's atmosphere into the "bottomless pit." See Rev. 12:7-9, 20:1-2. Then their place of influence and authority and power will be taken over by Christ and his glorified Church as the Rulers of a new world. Then will begin the promised "new heavens (spiritual control) and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness."

A concluding vision of the great destruction that will end the present world is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 where the nations of this world are gathered to do battle against Almighty God and the nation of Israel. According to this prophecy, it will take seven months to bury all who have died in battle and to destroy all their weapons. This mighty battle of the forces of evil and godlessness against the Lord is also described in Zech. 14:1-5 and in Revelation 19:11-21. When this destruction of all evil on earth is accomplished, and Satan himself is imprisoned for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3), then a glorious world proclamation will be made as recorded in Rev. 11:15-18: *"The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever. And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying,*

'We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who was, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.'"

What will happen to the meek and God-fearing people during this world-wide time of anarchy and trouble? Will they be protected by God? Will they be safe? We have a few prophecies in mind which seem to bear on this thought. In Psalm 46:1-5 we read: **"God is our refuge and strength...therefore, we will not fear, though the earth (society) should change; though the mountains (nations) are swept into the midst of the sea (swallowed up by the turbulent masses of peoples), when the waters thereof roar and are troubled (infuriated), when the mountains (kingdoms) shake with its tumult. God will help her (the Church, the faithful) and that right early, at the dawning of the morning."**

Again in Psalm 46, verses 6-10, the same story is restated in other symbols: "The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; He uttered His voice, the earth (society) melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Then, viewing the results of that time of trouble from beyond it, he adds, "Come, behold the works of the Lord, how He has wrought desolations in the earth. **He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, He burns the chariots with fire.** Be still, and know that I am God (acknowledge me as Sovereign). I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth." In the new earth or order of society, God will be worshipped and exalted as over all, and controlling all.

In Zephaniah 1:2, 3 we have a prophecy of the utter destruction of this evil world, ruled by Satan, in unmistakable terms: "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the Lord. I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will overthrow the wicked; I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth, says the Lord."

But then in Zephaniah. 2:3 there is a kindly admonition to those who love God and desire to serve Him: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; you may be hidden in the day of the wrath of the Lord."

Another promising text of safety and protection at that time is found in Isaiah 26:20, 21: "Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your door behind you; hide yourself for a little while until the wrath is past. For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her, and will no more cover her slain."

So it seems certain, according to the above texts, that the Lord will protect all His people on the earth during that awful time of trouble. He never breaks His promises.

One last prophecy on this matter of protection is found in Zech., 13:8, 9: "In the whole land, says the Lord, two thirds shall be cut off and perish and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third to the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name (for protection) and I will answer them. I will say, they are my people; and they will say, **'The Lord is my God.'**" Basing our thoughts on the above prophecy, it seems very likely that one third of the world's population will be left alive to be refined and purified by God and taught to make all the necessary preparation for the care and comfort of the billions who will gradually return from the grave.

According to the Bible, *the great tribulation, and day of vengeance of our God* will immediately precede the Lord's Second Coming. This time of God's wrath will accomplish the work of destruction of the present evil systems. Some Bible texts (some of which have already been cited) on this subject are as follows: Matt. 24:21; Dan. 12:1; Isa. 34:4, 8; Mal. 4:1; 2 Pet. 3:12; Joel 2:2-11; Zeph. 1:14-18; 3:8,9; Jas. 5:1-6; Ezek. 7:17-19; Isa. 2:12-21; Matt. 24:21; Rev. 14:18-20; 19:15.

How do we know for sure that the end of this present world is close at hand? Is such a belief based on wishful thinking or on prophetic facts? Here is presented evidence for your careful and unbiased consideration. 2 Timothy 3:1-5: *"But understand this, that in the last days (of this evil age) there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, **holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.** Avoid such people."*

Perilous means: dangerous; likely to cause injury; pain; an unsafe place or time. Surely as we look around us today, there are indeed all kinds of dangers. Let us examine a few. More and more people are taking drugs, both young and old, on a scale never before known. Alcoholism is an accepted way of life, even though it is responsible for half of all the deaths of those who are killed on our highways. Pornography is rampant and is supported by much of the public, both in motion pictures, literature, the internet etc. This type of trash has a definite effect on the morals of the people. Immorality of every kind is rampant. We have an epidemic of AIDS, causing people to fear for their very lives.

Men brag and boast and are proud of their ill-gotten gains. They are irreverent and profane; being evil-minded, they curse and hate the righteous. All morality and Christian principles are being challenged in the educational system, and history is being rewritten to remove that upon which this country was founded. Children, having little or no godly guidance, are more and more disobedient to parents, mistaking license for freedom. *"Men shall be lovers of their own selves."* This means mankind is becoming more and more selfish; their attitude is to look out for themselves, *get there* before the other fellow beats you to it! Books such as *Looking out for # One* and *How to Intimidate* are filling the shelves of the bookstores. Goals are to be reached whether by fair or foul means; the world recognizes power and success and wealth even though one is a scoundrel or tyrant in reaching that goal. Covetousness is rampant.

Men and nations make agreements only to break them. There was a time when a man's word was his bond and could be relied upon. Not so today! False accusations, aiming at injuring or belittling others, are made in order that the falsifier might gain his own ends. Men become angry with little or no self-control, becoming fierce and destructive, hating those who do good. Today, mankind puts pleasure before anything else, even before God. They have a form of godliness, yet do not really believe nor trust God for deliverance or guidance. Read Galatians 5:19, 20 and see how every evil is the work of the flesh.

"Turning away from God."

Now the Spirit of the Lord speaks through the Apostle Paul, telling us that in these days some will depart from faith in God. Jesus raised the question, when he comes again, *"will he find faith on the earth?"* (Luke 18:8). Then he answers his own question, saying, *"as it was in the days of Noah, so also shall the coming of the Son of man be. For as it was in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered into the ark. And knew not until the flood came and took them all; so shall it also be at the coming of the Son of man."* Matt. 24:37-39. We know in Noah's day the Bible tells us *"men's hearts were evil continually"* (Gen. 6:5).

The people will be giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. In view of present-day enlightenment, we find many people turning to the occult world, necromancy, spiritism, demonism, astrology, and open worship of Satan. Yes, the devil is deceiving the vast majority of people on the earth today. (See 2 Timothy 3:13.) *"Your Adversary the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour...resist him"* (1 Peter 5:8). We are cautioned not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

*How can we try the spirits? "And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards...should not a people seek unto their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony, **if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them**" (Isaiah 8:19, 20).*

1 Cor. 2:12, 13: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit." Paul continues in 1 Timothy 4:1-3: "Giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared." What a horrible condition to fall into—to be cold, callused, calculating, no feeling of compassion, understanding or mercy, nor any consideration of others—how completely devoid of the spirit of love and a sound mind are such.

What about the pollution of our earth and its atmosphere? We read of air, water, and soil pollution; our natural resources are being depleted because of abuse and greed. There is a scarcity of food and fear of over-population. These conditions were also foretold in the Bible. "The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers. *The earth lies polluted* under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws (of nature), violated the statutes...therefore, a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt" (Isa. 24:4-6). Yes, this world is polluted both morally and in its environment. God foreknew what man would do and inspired the above texts to be written as a warning for the time of the end. But man does not listen to God.

One final proof that we are fast approaching the end of the world is the nation of Israel. (Read Jeremiah chapter 24) Israel is likened to figs in the Bible (Jeremiah 29:17, 18). At one time they were vile figs and God cast them out of their land and scattered them among the Gentile nations of the earth for punishment. Nevertheless, God said He would restore them to their land again in the latter days, and they would never again be scattered. (See Ezekiel 11:16-21; 20:41-44; 34:12-16; Amos 9:15)

We should be convinced as we read and meditate on all these things that we are rapidly approaching the time of the end of this world, for as promised, communications and transportation have increased tremendously even to seeing astronauts talking to the earth from the moon and other planets, and knowledge in all branches of science have developed to fantastic proportions (Daniel 12:4). In one man's lifetime, he has gone from the time of the horse and carriage to a man walking on the Moon! Indeed, this is the time of the end when mankind would be running to and fro and knowledge would be increased. Nevertheless, people are in great perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear, and looking for those things that are coming upon the earth, for the powers of heaven (the evil spiritual ones) shall be shaken and destroyed (Luke 21:26). Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for (are waiting for) a new heavens and a new earth (new spiritual and earthly rule) wherein dwells righteousness. (See 2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1.) PRAISE GOD!

A BETTER DAY IS COMING

A better day is coming, a morning promised long,
When truth and right, with holy might, shall overthrow the wrong;
When Christ the Lord will listen to every plaintive sigh,
And stretch His hand o'er sea and land, with justice by and by.
O! for that glorious dawning we watch and wait and pray,

Till o'er the height the morning light shall drive the gloom away;
And when the heavenly glory shall flood the earth and sky,
We'll bless the Lord, exalt His Name—we'll Praise and Glorify!

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLING MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL
32 Chapel Lane, Somersworth, NH 03878