

He Created It Not in Vain

The Destiny of the Earth: Glorification, Not Destruction

"The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"—
Habakkuk 2:14

SECOND PETER CHAPTER THREE

AT various times and in many ways, prominence has been given to the sensational subject known as "The End of the World." A casual reading of this chapter in Peter might well give encouragement to the supporters of this doctrine.

But is this really what the apostle means? And is this the consistent picture we find throughout the Scriptures—that this earth on which we live will some day be completely destroyed?

There are many answers offered: some religious, some scientific. The consensus of opinion in the religious world seems to be that the apostle intended it to be so understood. Yes, some say, the earth is really to be burned up and will disappear from the universe, resulting in the complete destruction of mankind and every living creature.

Some of us will doubtless recall the appearance of Halley's Comet in 1910, the most notable of all comets, appearing only once every 76 years. It is much larger than other comets, and its fiery tail spreads out in the heavens in great magnitude. It was a wonderful sight to behold. At first, some "scientists" believed that it would crash into the earth; but as time passed careful calculations showed that this idea was erroneous. The next theory submitted was that the earth would pass through the tail of the comet and, if it did, all vegetation and every form of animal life including the human race, would be completely destroyed. However, in a few days it disappeared from view, and will not be seen again until 1986.

Early in 1919 another idea made headlines in many papers, when a prominent British clergyman predicted there would be a speedy end of the earth by burning. He stated that a close friend of his had completed a 10-year study of the Great Pyramid in Egypt and had discovered absolute proof. Dates were fixed, he said, and the terrestrial system would positively come to an end near the close of the year 1919. That was 57 years ago.

There are many other forms of "scientific" speculation on this subject that have caught the public fancy, but further time on them would be wasted. We much prefer to direct attention to the rational and beautiful revelation concerning the future of the earth found in God's infallible Word, the Bible.

Now the Bible does speak of the "End of the World." In fact, Jesus mentions it several times

In Matt. 13:40 he says—

"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world (*aion*)."

And in Matt. 24:3 the disciples asked Jesus—

"What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (*aion*)?"

The generally accepted idea appears to come from the notion that the word "world" in the Bible means exclusively the earth on which we dwell. But this is a mistaken concept. In John 15:18 we read—

"If the world (*kosmos*) hate you, ye know it hated me before it hated you."

Again—

"The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world (*kosmos*) is gone after him" (John 12:19).

In the first case, the *earth* does not hate anyone; and in the 2nd, the *earth* did not follow Jesus. If possible, it's clearer in Acts 17:6—

"They drew Jason and certain brethren to the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world (*oikoumene*) upside down are come hither also."

In Rev. 13:3 we read—

"All the world (*gee*) wondered after the Beast."

This is the only place *gee* is translated 'world': it is usually translated 'land, earth, country or ground.' It is obvious that Jason and his friends did not turn the literal earth upside down, nor any literal part of it. And it is obvious that the literal ground or globe did not wonder after the Beast. If, then, *world* does not necessarily refer to the planet upon which we dwell, it is certainly manifest that the expression "End of the World" does not mean "End of the Earth."

What then does it mean? Well, as we see in the above examples, there are 4 Greek words translated "world" in the New Testament—*aion*, *kosmos*, *oikoumene*, and *gee*. *Aion* actually means 'age,' and is so translated in RSV, Diaglott, etc. *Kosmos* means arrangement or order of things during a given period of time. *Oikoumene* means 'inhabited region,' and *gee* means 'land or earth.' All 4 are at times applied to people or conditions, as seen above.

The Bible speaks of 4 successive 'worlds,' or great dispensational divisions of history—

1. In 2 Pet. 3: 6 the apostle speaks of "the World that was." World here is *kosmos* and refers to the age before the Flood. In 2: 5 he calls it the "old world (*kosmos*).” The earth itself was not destroyed at that time, but the entire 'arrangement' or 'order of things' ended.

2. In 2 Pet. 3:7-10 the apostle refers to the then existing order of things as "the heaven and the earth which *are now*.” This is the age or dispensation relating to the nation of Israel. It began in Abraham and ended in the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews to all parts of the earth. Jesus refers to this period and its termination when he speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem—

"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

Here Jesus indicates the end of the Jewish or Israelitish world or age, and the beginning of another age—

3. The Gentile age or world, which was to continue till the "times of the Gentiles" be fulfilled. This word "times" comes from Greek *kairos*, meaning "a fixed time or period." This is an interim or interregnum period—the dark night of unrestrained evil when no divine political entity exists at all. The whole world is given over to the political power of sin. The end of this period of the Gentiles is described by Jesus in Luke 21:25-26—

"There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars [note the use of the heavenly phenomena in a political sense]; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring [another clear political figure]; men's hearts failing for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. For the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

What words could better describe the present state of world affairs? There are 2 brilliant signs in view today in the political heavens indicating that the Gentile age is coming to a close. They are clearly seen in the above verses (Luke 21:24-26).

February 1949 saw the first phase of the end of the down-treading of Jerusalem by the election of Dr. Weizmann as the first President of the new State of Israel: a nation reborn after 2000 years. We have seen further phases since, especially in 1967 when Jerusalem came entirely under Jewish control.

4. The 4th world, or "Age to Come," is indicated by Peter in v. 13—

"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth (*gee*), wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The present world is dominated by sin, disease and death, but in the world to come it is testified that— (Psa. 37)—

1. *The righteous shall flourish, and the wicked shall be cut off;*
2. *The meek shall inherit the earth and dwell therein forever;*
3. *And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*

Like the previous "worlds," it will be upon this earth, but unlike them it will be an age without end.

It may be said that this all sounds reasonable, but still in 2 Pet. 3 it is definitely stated that the earth is to be burned up. One writer says the words of Peter are unmistakable, and any attempt to explain them figuratively must prove fruitless. He is unmoved by all the testimony that says the earth will be filled with peace, righteousness and God's glory. He thinks all *that* has to be taken "figuratively." Well, let us see. Suppose we read v. 10 again—

"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 (*gee*) also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

And now V. 12—

"Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat."

Now V. 11—

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."

All right, let us suppose just for a moment the earth is to be literally burned up. *What about the heavens?* Peter says they are to be dissolved with fire too. What do we have left? No earth and no heavens. There must be some more sensible explanation, especially in view of the multitude of testimony concerning the glorious destiny of the earth, and such definite declarations as Psa. 37—

9. "Evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall INHERIT THE EARTH.

10. "For yet a little while and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

11. "But the meek shall INHERIT THE EARTH, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

20. "The righteous shall inherit the land, and *dwell therein forever.*"

Again, we read in Eccl. 1:4—

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the *earth abideth forever.*"

And finally, in Isaiah 45:18—

"For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it. He hath established it: *He created it not in vain*; He formed it to be inhabited. I am the Lord, and there is none else."

God's purpose with the earth is not failure, but glory; for many times He has declared—

"As truly as I live, all the earth SHALL be filled with My glory" (Num. 14:21; Psa. 72:19; Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14; Mal. 1: 11).

It would certainly be failure if the present is the best it will ever be. It has never been filled with His glory: it is less so than ever today.

We have quoted from the prophets. Now let us go back to Peter—

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you, in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were *spoken before by the holy prophets*, and of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour" (2 Pet. 3:1-2).

And then his warning (vs. 16-17) where he speaks of the apostle Paul—

"As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness."

No! Let us not be carried away by a view that ignores the whole beautiful picture of the prophets, and thinks the literal earth is to be destroyed. We cannot believe that, and believe Jesus at the same time, for he declared—

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"(Matt. 5:5).

The earth is to be regenerated and glorified: not destroyed. Note carefully vs. 5-7 and you will see Peter was comparing the judgment that came upon the world in the days of Noah with the great judgment that was then soon to come on the Israelitish world—

"For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water, and in the water: whereby the world (*kosmos*) that THEN WAS, being overflowed with water, perished. But the heavens and the earth which ARE NOW, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

The "world" that *then was* "perished" in divine judgment of water, but the planet itself did not perish. So, the present "world" will perish in divine judgment of fire, but the globe will not perish, but will be cleansed and glorified.

Jesus made a similar comparison in Matt. 24:37-39—

"But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not till the Flood came and took them all away—*so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*"

Did you ever notice the general trend of Peter's 2nd epistle? In Ch. 1 he speaks (v. 10-11) of the "everlasting Kingdom." In Ch. 2 he warns (v. 1) against false teachers and (v. 5) speaks again about Noah. And in Ch. 3 he stirs up their minds (vs. 1-2) by referring to the Prophets; and then again (v.13) he refers to the Kingdom. Peter knew exactly what the Prophets had said about the Kingdom and where it would be. It is the neglect of these things—the broad, overall scriptural picture—that causes people to twist passages to fit some theory.

Now look at v. 5 again and see how he speaks of the "heavens and earth" of Noah's day; then in v. 7 he speaks of the "heavens and earth" of his own time. Does he mean the literal heavens and earth? How could he? They were the same in both cases, and still are. They were not destroyed in Noah's day.

Any who are familiar with the Old Testament know that "heavens and earth" are frequently used to represent people on the earth—rulers and ruled. Moses, addressing Israel, says (Deut. 32:1)—

"Give ear, O ye heavens [rulers of the people], and I will speak, and hear, O earth [the general body of the people], the words of my mouth."

And Isaiah begins his address to the nation the same way—

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken" (1:2).

And now we come back to Peter. In vs. 10-12 we have a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D by the Romans. In v.13 he speaks of the "new heavens *and new earth*." The objector never deals with the fact that there is to be a "NEW EARTH." He must take this too as a literal globe, so he is back where he started.

This "world to come wherein dwelleth righteousness" will be the fulfilment of the Word of God through Moses (Num. 14:21)—

"As truly as I live, all the EARTH shall be filled with the glory of the Lord."

The earth is the handiwork of God, and was created with a definite, stated object in view, *not yet accomplished*. Psal. 19: 1—

"The heavens declare the glory of God, & the firmament sheweth His handiwork."

And Rev.4: 11 states—

"Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created."

There is no *present* pleasure to God from the condition of things on the earth, nor ever has been since the first man sinned. At the very beginning, because of transgression of divine law and the entry of sin into the world, a curse was placed upon the earth (Gen. 3:17)—

"And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee saying, Thou shalt not eat of it—*cursed is the ground for thy sake*: in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life."

Following this event, and up to the present, sin, disease and death have reigned. But when the earth shall—as God has solemnly sworn—be "filled with the glory of the Lord," a great change will take place—

"He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord will wipe away tears from off all faces. And the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off *all the earth*, for the Lord hath spoken it " (Isa. 25:7-8).

"When Thy judgments are *in the earth*, then will the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9).

"He (God's Servant) shall not fail till he have set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law" (Isa. 42:4).

"I (God) will give thee (Christ) for a covenant of the people to establish *the earth*: to cause to inherit the desolate heritages" (Isa. 49:8).

"Give Him no rest till He make Jerusalem a praise *in the earth*" (Isa. 62:7).

This is confirmed by the New Testament in Rev. 21:4—

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

There is a similar beautiful prophecy in the next chapter—

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the Tree of Life. And the leaves of the Tree were for the healing of the nations.

"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it: and His servants shall serve Him." (Rev. 22:1-3).

Yes, *on the earth*, but not under present conditions. Then a truly wise and righteous government will bring real peace to all peoples—

"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end; upon the throne of David and upon his Kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:6-7).

God promised the same through Jeremiah (23:5)—

"I will raise unto David a Righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice IN THE EARTH."

Then shall at last come to pass the prophetic song of the angels at the birth of Jesus—

"Glory, to God in the highest; and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

How will this be accomplished? The prophet Micah tells us—

"In the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the House of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

"And many nations shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the House of the God of Jacob: and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For the Law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (4:1-3).

We have been invited by the gracious Gospel call of a loving Father to share freely in the inconceivable joys of the world to come. This is the glorious hope set before us in the Bible. This earth, now groaning under the burden of sin and evil, is to be renewed and glorified. And God will accomplish it the way He has revealed, and none other.

Peter was anxious for his friends to know these things and bring them ever to remembrance. He therefore stirred them up that they might be mindful of what had been written by God's holy prophets of old. Among them are the words of Solomon (Eccl. 1:4)—

"One generation passeth away & another cometh, but *the earth abideth forever*."

Of course, the question is not whether a doctrine is beautiful, but whether it is true. What we have presented is beautiful; but more importantly, it is THE TRUTH, because it is based entirely upon the revealed Word of God—that Word which He has "magnified above all His Name"—Psa. 138:2; that Word which is able to make us "wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"—2 Tim.3: 15.

Never mind what others think or say! Use your own power of study and thought to learn and understand what God has revealed. Jesus said—

"Know the Truth: and the Truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Yes, free from the superstition that surrounds us on every side; free from the veil that is spread over the world; free from the darkness that covers the people—so that we may walk in the Light of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God!

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