

# Is The World Coming To An End?

## IS THIS THE END?

When peace and prosperity are the order of the day, when terrorism and war are the last things on our minds, when we are feeling encouraged and optimistic about human nature, thoughts about the end of the world seldom cross our minds. But when financial markets crash, when terror strikes in our own country and war breaks out in the Middle East, when human depravity threatens the safety of our homes and our children, discussions about the end seem to crop up everywhere.

In recent years, there have been more than enough reasons for people to think a lot about the end of the world. In addition to all the uncertainty we have come to feel about life in general, the very popular Left Behind series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins has used religious fiction to expose a whole new generation to such ideas as The Antichrist, Armageddon, The Millennium, The Rapture, and The Great Tribulation. Today, judging simply by book sales, both Christians and non-Christians appear to be fascinated about anything that relates to the end of the world.

More and more people are asking, "What does the Bible say about the end of the world? Are we living in the last days? Do terrorist attacks and wars in Israel signal a coming destruction of our planet? Is the world coming to an end?" With these concerns on our minds and in our hearts, we open our Bibles and search for what scripture says about the end of the world.

## THE END IS COMING!

The Bible teaches that time is moving toward a definite conclusion. The Ascension and the Second Coming of Jesus form the time brackets in which we now live. During the final week of Jesus' life, he taught,

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31-32).

Luke records that, later, on the day when Jesus ascended into heaven, the following encounter took place:

They (the disciples) were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10-11).

Since that time, all Christians have been waiting for the return of Jesus. Paul once wrote to new Christians,

...You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Scripture teaches that the return of Jesus will bring about the destruction of the world and the final judgment.

That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (2 Peter 3:12-14).

So, that is the way the world will end. But when will it happen, and what does the Bible say about what we can and cannot know about this great event?

### **WHEN WILL IT HAPPEN?**

During the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry, he and his disciples were walking away from the temple one day when the disciples called Jesus' attention to the magnificence of that structure. Jesus responded,

"Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). Later, in a private conversation between Jesus and his disciples, the disciples asked him,

"Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3).

The disciples thought they were asking one question, thinking that the

temple would be destroyed at the end of the age. However, Jesus separated their question into two parts, answering one at a time.

Concerning the destruction of the temple, something that occurred when the Roman army destroyed the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jesus said,

"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matthew 24:34-35).

However, in that same discussion, Jesus also spoke of the end of the age:

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36).

Years later, when the Apostle Paul spoke to a group of philosophers in Athens, he mentioned that coming day of judgment:

"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Christians believe that there is, indeed, "a great day coming." However, when that day will be is a secret that is hidden in the heart of God. Anyone who claims to know when Jesus will return, based on their interpretation of particular biblical prophecies, is professing to know something that Jesus clearly said was concealed even from his eyes.

In the interim, between now and the time when Jesus returns, his followers are to live in a constant state of readiness.

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.... So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matthew 24:42, 44).

Our concern is not to determine the time when Jesus will return; it is to be ready whenever that time occurs.

**GOOD NEWS!**

I remember attending gospel meetings when I was growing up in which a lot was said about the return of Jesus and the day of judgment. All of my memories of those sermons are wrapped in fear. The coming of the Lord was a very terrifying prospect, a virtual spiritual nightmare. It was several years before I realized that the return of Jesus at the end of time is something that biblical writers wrote about with a sense of longing. For them it was a happy thought. The Second Coming was good news! It will be a time when troubles are over, injustice is wiped away and communion with God will be complete.

Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:7-8).

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:11-13).

The final words of the entire Bible speak wistfully about the return of Jesus.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen (Revelation 22:20-21).

## **BACK TO WHERE WE STARTED**

So, to answer our original question, "Is the world coming to an end?" the answer is "Yes!" Some day, Jesus will return to judge the world, and the earth will be no more. On that day we will all "appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). For Christians, that will be a day of unparalleled joy; for non-Christians it will be a day of punishment. When will that day be? We simply don't know. Because of that, we must live every day as if it were the last, anxiously awaiting the second coming of Christ. Come, Lord Jesus.

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