

The World's Judgment Day

“He [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

—Acts 17:31

majority of the human race have been unbelievers for whom it is thought that the judgment day will be one of terror, it is frequently spoken of as “doomsday.”

Let us note well that this concept of the world's coming judgment day is merely a tradition, another of those misconceptions handed down to us from the Dark Ages. The judgment day which the Bible

IN THE MINDS OF MANY,

the coming day of judgment is to be a period of twenty-four hours. It is thought that in this day the righteous and the unrighteous will be summoned before a judgment seat occupied by Jesus to hear their eternal fate declared. According to this belief, the righteous will be sent to heaven and the unrighteous to a place of torment. Since history indicates the vast

describes is a period of one thousand years, during which mankind in general will be on probation for the purpose of proving their worthiness, or unworthiness, of everlasting life here on the earth.

A PAST JUDGMENT DAY

The need for the world's future judgment day arose at the time when our first parents were tested in the Garden of Eden. They failed under that test and came under condemnation to death. This condemnation was passed on to their children, and thus Adam and his descendants became a dying race. Paul wrote, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."—Rom. 5:12

When Jesus came, he explained that he had not come to condemn the world, but that the world through him might have life. (John 3:17) On this point, Paul wrote, "As by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Jesus] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."—Rom. 5:18,19

The life provided by the ransom sacrifice of Christ is not thrust upon anyone. It is obtainable only upon the basis of acceptance and obedience. At the present time, this is upon the basis of faith, and those who receive it are called upon to lay down their lives in sacrifice, even as Jesus did. Few, indeed, have been willing to meet these rigid conditions of discipleship. In the first place, the vast majority have never had an opportunity really to

know about Christ in an understandable manner. Those who died prior to the First Advent had no opportunity to believe on him. Even since Jesus' earthly ministry millions have lived and died never hearing of Jesus. They likewise had no chance to know him and accept the provisions of divine love available through him and his work of redemption.

GOD'S WRATH MANIFESTED

Jesus said that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all . . . unrighteousness." (Rom. 1:18) This does not mean that God is vindictive. It is a reference, rather, to the death condemnation which came upon our first parents because of their failure to obey God's law, and to the manner in which it is manifested in their children, the human race.

This death condemnation is indeed visible on every hand. We see evidences of it in every graveyard, in every funeral home, in every doctor's office, in every hospital. We each experience it in every ache and every pain. The Bible speaks of this death condemnation as an evidence of God's anger against sin, but it also tells us that this anger endures but for a moment, adding, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—Ps. 30:5

This foretold morning of joy is in reality the morning of the world's coming thousand-year judgment day. This coming new "day" is to be one of enlightenment, during which all will have a full opportunity to know the Lord. The people will then be on probation to determine whether or not they will, under those favorable conditions, turn to the Lord in belief and obedience. Those doing so will

receive the provision of life made for them through Jesus, their Redeemer.

TO LEARN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Isaiah 26:9 declares that when God's judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants will learn righteousness. This educational program is essential if the world of mankind is to have a full opportunity to know the Lord and to know his will concerning them. In this future judgment day, the people will not be judged in their ignorance, but upon the basis of an understanding of the provisions of divine grace made for them through Christ.

There is no salvation outside of Christ, but one must know Christ in order to believe on him. Paul wrote, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:13,14) The purpose of the judgment day is to enlighten the world so that they may know and believe and obey.

In a glowing description of the people's rejoicing during the judgment day, the psalmist informs us that the Lord "shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth." (Ps. 96:10-13) This is another way of saying that the people will be judged upon the basis of the Truth which will then be revealed to them. This will be the Truth concerning the provision of life made for them through the death of Jesus and the Lord's requirements of belief and obedience.

Through another of his prophets, the Lord declares, "Then will I turn to the people a pure

language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” (Zeph. 3:9) This text shows that the enlightenment of the people will lead to their united worship and service of the Lord. No longer will contradictory creeds and the influence of false gods hinder the people from knowing the true God and intelligently serving him.

JESUS’ TESTIMONY

Jesus said, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” (John 12:46-48) The expressions “last day” and “latter days” are used a number of times in the Bible to describe the period of Christ’s thousand-year earthly kingdom. At that time, the dead will be awakened from the sleep of death and the world in general will be enlightened and given an opportunity to believe, obey, and live forever. “[God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”—I Tim. 2:4

The above scriptures inform us that the knowledge of the Truth provided in this prophetic “last day” will be Jesus’ word and teachings. This knowledge, together with man’s response to what he then learns, will be the basis upon which the people will be judged. This agrees with the other testimony of the Scriptures which we have examined indicating that the future judgment day of the world will be a

time of enlightenment. It will be a time when the people will learn the real truth concerning the Creator's grand design for their eternal blessing.

BOOKS OPENED

This fact is further confirmed in Revelation 20:12, where the Apostle John says, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." This is, of course, symbolic language. It does not mean that all the millions of the dead will literally stand before God. The word "stand" is here used in much the same way as it is today when we say that one has a "standing" in court.

When our first parents transgressed God's law, they lost their standing before God. Without his favor, they could not continue to live. They died, and so did their progeny. God, in his love, provided redemption through Christ Jesus and, during the future judgment day, all will be awakened from the sleep of death for the purpose of being judged. In this position, the original condemnation upon man will have been lifted. Through Christ, all the willing and obedient will gain a standing before God, or as John explains, will "stand" before him.

In this position, mankind will be judged—judged by the things contained in the books which will then be opened. Many suppose that those books contain a record of the past lives of the people. This is not the thought at all. The Lord knows that upon the basis of their past lives these "dead, small and

great” would not be found worthy of everlasting life. The “books” contain the Truth by which the people are judged.

This is the Truth concerning Jesus and his work of redemption. It is also the Truth concerning God’s standards of righteousness to which all worthy of life must adhere. It is the “pure language” which will be turned to the people at that time. It is the words or teachings of Jesus which he said would judge the people in the “last day.” It will be man’s response during that time to the teachings of God’s “book,” both in heart as well as by action, that is to be judged.

No longer will the world be shrouded in heathen and other forms of darkness. The greatest cause of darkness and superstition in the world today is the deceptive influence of Satan. We are assured that Satan, who has deceived all nations, will be bound during that judgment day, that he may deceive the nations no more. (Rev. 20:1,2) With the light of God’s truth flooding the earth, every individual will know that only by accepting Christ as his Redeemer and then obeying the righteous laws of the Messianic kingdom can he gain eternal life.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

The thought of attaining life in the judgment day is symbolized in Revelation 20:12 by a “book of life” in which the names of the worthy ones are written. Like the “books” of knowledge, the “book of life” is also said to be opened at that time. Clearly the thought of the entire text is that the people will be enlightened, and upon the basis of their response to this enlightenment they will be judged. If their

response, their “works,” are favorable, their names will be placed in the book of life and they will attain everlasting life.

This is a “book” of human life, and during that future period of probation, those who prove worthy of having their names entered and remain therein will live on the earth as humans forever. They will no longer be imperfect or afflicted with disease and pain. Rather, they will be restored to the perfection which Adam lost when he transgressed God’s law in the Garden of Eden. Revelation 21:4 declares of the culmination of that future day of blessing, “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

ASSOCIATE JUDGES

The future judgment day of the world will not be for the purpose of determining who are Christians and who are not. The faithful followers of Jesus will already have passed through their trial, or judgment period, having proved worthy of “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) These will be associated with Jesus in the work of judging the world of mankind in general. Paul wrote, “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” (I Cor. 6:2) These will be the “angels” (Greek, “messengers”) who will be with Jesus in his judgment throne of glory when all nations are being judged by him, as stated in the parable of the sheep and the goats.—Matt. 25:31-46

In this parable, those during the future judgment day who qualify for everlasting life are symbolized by sheep, while those who (Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 31) do not thus qualify are referred to symbolically as goats. The “sheep” are shown to be those who are motivated by a loving interest in their fellows and thus enter into the spirit of that new day. The “goats” are those who continue, even under those favorable conditions, to pursue their selfish ways. The parable indicates that there will be such a class of willful sinners. These are the ones who Peter said would be “destroyed from among the people.”—Acts 3:23

Those who through obedience to the spirit of the open “books” manifest the spirit of love will, as Jesus said, “go away . . . into life eternal.” The wicked will go into “everlasting punishment,” symbolized in the parable by the destructive element of fire. Many have misinterpreted the statement “everlasting punishment” to mean eternal torture, but this is not the correct thought. The punishment, or “wages,” of sin is death. (Rom. 6:23) If the death is eternal, which it will be in the case of willful sinners, then it will be everlasting punishment or, as the Greek text puts it, an everlasting cutting off.

In this parable, Jesus says to the “sheep” class, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. 25:34) This is the kingdom, or dominion, that was given to our first parents when they were created. It was the dominion over the earth and over the lower forms of creation on the earth. The Genesis record reads, “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing

that creepeth upon the earth.” (Gen. 1:26) This is the kingdom that was given to mankind in the beginning, and this is the kingdom that will be restored to the willing and obedient at the close of the world’s thousand-year judgment day.

A FUTURE TIME

David wrote concerning man, “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands.” Paul quotes this, and adds, “We see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” (Ps. 8:6; Heb. 2:8,9) Thus, Paul explains that the death of Jesus provided for the eventual restoration of man’s life and dominion.

It is Jesus who, in his parable of the sheep and the goats, explains when man’s lost dominion will be restored. It will be at the close of the world’s judgment day, when he will say to those proven righteous at that time, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” When this great event in the plan of God is accomplished, none will need to say as Paul did, that “we see not yet all things put under” man. All will then know that the grand design of the Creator through Christ has been fulfilled and that all things have been put under man. His lost dominion shall have been restored.

GOOD AND EVIL

The sin of our first parents consisted in their eating of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” (Gen. 2:9) The fact that God planted this tree

together with the others in the Garden of Eden suggests that he desired his perfect human creatures to have an understanding of both good and evil. That he made eating of the fruit of this tree a test of obedience indicates his foreknowledge of the fact that this knowledge could be acquired only by experience.

God informed Adam that disobedience would lead to death. (Gen. 2:17) He knew that his human creation would experience much evil as a result of disobedience. Since Adam's disobedience, the world has been filled with sickness, sorrow, and death. Truly all have received an experimental knowledge of evil and its terrible consequences. This has come about as a result of that original act of disobedience in Eden—the partaking of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

During all this time, mankind has had little opportunity to learn about good and its results. True, probably most people in every generation have experienced moments, perhaps days or even a few years, of relative happiness. However, for the most part the dying human race has continued to groan under the weight of sin and death. Man has increased this suffering by his inhumanity to man, and selfishness in all its ugly forms has continued to plague the human race from Eden until now.

This situation will change with the establishment of Christ's kingdom. Under the laws of that kingdom evil will be restrained, Adamic death will be destroyed, and the dead will be restored to life. Then, for the first time in a universal way, the human race will experience good. Only then will they be in a position to judge upon the basis of

actual experience whether to choose evil and die, or to choose good and live.

This is the divine purpose in the permission of evil. God did not wish his human creatures to be like robots, obeying him because they had no choice to do otherwise. He wanted them to obey and serve him because they delight to do so. He desired them to do righteously because they realized upon the basis of a full knowledge of the issues involved that this was the only proper thing to do.

It is this willing desire to serve the Creator that will be manifested by the restored human race at the close of the thousand-year day of judgment. The people will then know the Lord and appreciate the advantages of being in harmony with him. They will have learned fully of his love in providing redemption and salvation through Christ. As those ransomed by the gift of God's dear Son and his sacrificial death, mankind "shall return . . . with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isa. 35:10) Let us then not fear, but look forward to this time, soon to come, spoken of in our opening scripture—the day "in the which he will judge the world in righteousness." ■