

Man's Eternal Home

***“The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’S: but the earth hath he given to the children of men.”
—Psalm 115:16***

THE CREATOR OF THE

universe designed the earth to be the eternal home of his human family. When God created our first parents he said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth

and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”—Gen. 1:28, *English Standard Version*

The Bible states that the Creator prepared a special garden home for Adam in the eastern part of Eden. “Out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. ... And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayst freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”—Gen. 2:8,9,16,17

These divinely inspired statements of the Bible clearly show that man was created to live on the earth. He would find everything on the earth adapted to his needs, comfort and joy. However, the continued enjoyment of this earthly home, and dominion over it, depended upon his obedience to the Creator's commandments. He was warned that if he disobeyed he would die. The record is that man did indeed disobey the divine law, and that he was sentenced to death. God said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." —Gen. 3:17-19

It is important to observe that in pronouncing the sentence of death upon Adam the Lord said nothing about man being transferred to another part of the universe. The sentence clearly implies that man was to be deprived of continued life on the earth. In the garden which the Creator had specially prepared for our first parents there was a "tree of life." The Hebrew word here translated "tree" can be rendered just as correctly in the plural as "trees," and is so translated many times throughout the Old Testament. (Gen. 3:2,8; 23:17; Lev. 19:23; 26:4,20) In this case, there were many trees in the garden, the fruit of which would sustain life continuously. Thus, we believe it would be proper to refer to them collectively as "trees" of life. However, our first parents were driven out of the garden so that they could not have access to these life-giving trees. The

reason for this drastic action on God's part was, as he explains, so that man would no longer be able to access these trees in order to "eat, and live for ever." —Gen. 3:22-24

This shows further that God's original design was that man should live forever on the earth, and that every necessary provision had been made to enable him to do so. It was not God's purpose for man to live here for a few short years, and then to be taken to heaven or to some other place for eternity. He did not tell our first parents that if they obeyed they would one day go to heaven, or that if they disobeyed they would be consigned to a place of torment.

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

One wonders how the truth so clearly set forth in the opening chapters of Genesis could become so terribly distorted, but so it has been. As human traditions developed, the professed Christian world came to believe that dying and death are a natural and inevitable part of human experience. Most have concluded that it is God's plan for man to live but temporarily on the earth, and that during this short earthly life span he has an opportunity to prove worthy of an eternity of bliss in heaven. If unworthy, he will suffer everlasting separation from God, and possibly even physical torture and torment continuously for eternity.

The traditions of men attempt to lend support to the thought that human experience on earth is limited by the additional claim that at some time in the future God will destroy the literal earth. Then, it is claimed, all the remaining "worthy" ones on the earth will be taken to heaven at once, and all the

unworthy sent to a place of torment or, at a minimum, to a place of eternal separation from God. That, says tradition, will be the “end of the world,” and the end of planet Earth.

We cannot over-stress the fact that these unreasonable, even revolting views, are without support in the Word of God. Nothing of this sort was even hinted to Adam by the Creator. As we have seen, he was told to multiply and fill the earth. The earth was given to him as his home, and he was to have dominion over it. If disobedient to divine law, he was to forfeit all these blessings, and in death return to the elements of earth from which he had been formed. If human tradition be true, then God was false in his dealings with our first parents.

We know, without question, that Adam did disobey divine law, and was sentenced to death. However, this did not change God’s eternal purpose concerning his human creation. More than three thousand years later the Prophet Isaiah wrote, “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.”—Isa. 45:18

The declaration that God did not create the earth in vain, but formed it to be inhabited, clearly implies that his purpose as originally stated to Adam is still to be carried out. The Lord assures us that he has “established” the earth. He did not create it as a temporary dwelling, or as a place where he could merely experiment with a human creation. He designed the earth as a home for man, and its creation was “not in vain.” It is yet to be inhabited—not by a sinful, dying race, but by a righteous, living human race.

A few verses later in this same chapter of Isaiah the Lord says further: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." (Isa. 45:22,23) Two important thoughts appear in these words: (1) that salvation is provided for all those who look to God, and (2) that eventually every knee shall bow and every tongue confess allegiance to him.

Because of disobedience to divine law, man lost life. "In Adam all die," wrote the Apostle Paul. (I Cor. 15:22) However, this rebellion against God and against his authority in the earth is to be put down. Those who return to obedience to the Lord are to be delivered from the sentence of death which came upon Adam, and, through him, upon all mankind.

This program of salvation from death is accomplished through Christ Jesus, the Redeemer and Savior of mankind. Paul further wrote in the foregoing verse that just as all die through Adam, all who come into "union with Christ," whether now or in God's coming kingdom on earth, will "be made to live again." (I Cor. 15:22, *Williams New Testament*) Additionally, God's statement through the Prophet Isaiah that unto him "every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear," is quoted in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul and applied to Jesus. (Phil. 2:8-11) Thus the Scriptures show that the redemptive work accomplished by the death of Jesus is the Creator's provision for the salvation of all mankind. This, in turn, means that God did not

create the earth in vain, but that it will yet be inhabited by the redeemed and restored human race.

FURTHER ASSURANCES

Numerous Bible statements inform us of the fact that the earth is to abide eternally. In the Old Testament we are told that God “hath established for ever” the earth, and that the “earth abideth for ever.” (Ps. 78:69; 119:90; Eccles. 1:4) In the New Testament, Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5) This promise to the meek would be worthless if the earth is one day to be destroyed.

Another false, man-made tradition is that the death of Jesus as the Redeemer of the world did not provide the hope for the awakening of the dead to human life under the arrangement of a righteous kingdom to be established on the earth. The associated claim is perhaps made that if this was to be so, since Jesus died nearly two-thousand years ago, we should have expected such a kingdom and the supposed earthly resurrection to have at least begun long before now. However, this is a mistaken position due to the inability to understand the “due time” aspects of God’s plan of salvation.

In Hebrews 2:6-10, Paul reveals the manner in which the plan of God for human salvation is being accomplished. First, he quotes from the Psalm 8, in which David reminds us that man was created to be king of earth, and that all earthly things were put under his dominion. Then Paul adds, “But now 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. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Here Paul explains that while we do not now see man as king of earth, enjoying the dominion given to him when created, we do see that the plan of God for man's recovery from sin and death is moving forward. "We see Jesus," and we see that he "by the grace of God" tasted death for every man. Jesus' suffering and death were a very vital part of God's plan for mankind's restoration to life and earthly dominion.

The apostle also explains that through his suffering Jesus was trained to be the "captain" of our salvation. In the plan of God many "sons" are brought to "glory" through suffering, just as Jesus was. Thus we are reminded of the great truth of the divine plan that Jesus will have associated with him a group of "joint-heirs," called and chosen from among mankind. (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 17:14) These will share the work and glory of his kingdom, during which salvation will be brought to the remainder of mankind. The high reward of this called out class, attained through faithfulness in sacrifice and suffering, is described by Paul as the "great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord." Jesus is the "captain" of those who will attain this "great salvation."—Heb. 2:3

An entire age is set aside in God's plan for the calling and training of those who prove worthy to be exalted to glory with Jesus their captain. These have the privilege of suffering and dying with him.

They follow in his footsteps which lead to death. Because of this, when they accept Christ and dedicate their lives to follow him, they are not restored to perfection of human life. Rather, through the merit of Christ's blood, what is left of their imperfect and dying humanity is made acceptable as a sacrifice, which leads to death with Jesus.—Rom. 6:3-6; 12:1,2

The restoration of mankind in general to perfect life on earth as humans must wait until this sacrificial work of the present age is completed. That is why we do not as yet see any of the human race being restored to health and life. However, we have the assurance of the Word of God that this loving provision of his plan of salvation through Christ will, in his own due time, be accomplished. As Paul says, we see that Jesus “by the grace of God” has tasted death “for every man,” not merely for the called ones of the present age. The justice of God remains sure, and nothing can stand in the way of his almighty power in the accomplishment of his loving purposes. Thus we can be confident, even as the Creator himself has affirmed, that the earth was not created in vain, and that it will yet be inhabited by the restored human race.

The Apostle Peter locates the time for this work of restoration as following the second coming of Christ. He describes that period as “times of restitution of all things,” and declares that it was spoken by God through “the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

SOCIAL UPHEAVALS

Efforts have been made to find support for all the many traditional misconceptions of God's plan

of salvation. This has been done with respect to the idea that at the second coming of Christ the earth is to be destroyed. The apparent support found in the Bible for this tradition has come through a misunderstanding of the prophecies in which the words earth, world, and fire are used symbolically to illustrate the great upheavals of human society which would occur as a result of Christ's return, when he would overthrow Satan's empire and establish his kingdom.

Using plain language, the Bible describes the passing away of the rule of sin and selfishness under the direction of Satan, the "god of this world," as a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (II Cor. 4:4; Dan. 12:1) Jesus quoted from Daniel's prophecy, and applied it to the time subsequent to his return, using the expression "great tribulation" instead of "time of trouble."—Matt. 24:21,22

Jesus explained that this tribulation would be so severe that unless those days were shortened, no flesh would survive—that the entire human race would be destroyed. He gave assurance, however, that he would not permit this to happen. Since this is Jesus' assurance concerning the time associated with his return, it means that the traditional idea that then the earth would be burned up and the human race completely destroyed cannot be true. Jesus promised that all flesh will not be destroyed. "Those days shall be shortened." (vs. 22) The "end of the world" foretold in the Bible is the end of Satan's world, his evil dominion over earth and its inhabitants, mankind. Hence, all who love righteousness, and seek the eternal welfare of

mankind, should look forward to and desire with joyful anticipation the end of such a sin-cursed and dying world.

The Apostle John wrote, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”—I John 2:15-17

It is very evident that the Apostle John is not here writing about the literal earth, but of a social order which exists upon the earth. This is the “world” which Christians are not to love. Referring to the same thing, Jesus said to his disciples, “I have chosen you out of the world,” after which he reassured them, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 15:19; 16:33) It is this world which, John explains, “passeth away.” It is not the earth at all, but the evil conditions to be found everywhere in human society. These are to be supplanted by the establishment of God’s authority through the agencies of Christ’s kingdom. This is in keeping with Jesus’ prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”—Matt. 6:10

SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

The word “earth” is often used in the Bible to denote the association of mankind upon the earth. We read, “Let the earth be glad;” “Give ear, O earth;” and “Let the earth hear,” to cite but a few instances. (Ps. 96:11; Isa. 1:2; 34:1) We might continue to quote these examples of the figurative use of the

word earth, for there are many of them. Students of the Bible in reading these texts have no difficulty in understanding them, except when the passage refers to the destruction of the earth. Then, being influenced by the misconceptions of human tradition, they insist on a literal interpretation, and maintain the belief which calls for the earth to be destroyed, something which God's Word has assured us will never happen.

Psalm 46 prophetically describes certain conditions appertaining to the time of great tribulation foretold by Jesus. In this prophecy we are told that kingdoms would be "moved," and the "earth melted." (vs. 6) However, in the final picture presented in the prophecy we read, "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (vs. 10, *ESV*) Thus we find that after the symbolic earth "melts," the literal earth, the scene of the great time of trouble, still exists, and that God's name is exalted in it.

In order to help us understand more vividly the different aspects of the tribulation by which Satan's social order is destroyed, various expressions are used symbolically in the prophecies. The "time of trouble" is likened to a flood, to a storm, to winds, to an earthquake, and also to fire. (Nah. 1:7,8; Isa. 28:2; I Kings 19:11,12; Zeph. 3:8) All of these expressions are to be understood as symbols which denote and emphasize various circumstances associated with the demise of Satan's world.

Fire, in particular, is very devastating, and is used often in the Bible to symbolize destruction. Peter writes of the "fiery trial" which comes upon Christians to assist in the destruction of the fallen, sinful

tendencies of their characters. (I Pet. 4:12) Paul speaks of heaping “coals of fire” upon our enemy’s head by doing good unto them. (Rom. 12:20) No one would ever suppose that the “fire” in these various references is literal.

However, to claim scriptural support for human traditions, when fire is used in the prophecies to symbolize the destructive effects of the time of trouble in the earth, many insist that it must be literal fire. This has helped to keep alive the tradition concerning the burning up of the earth. Thus it has blinded many to the real plan of God for the restoration of the human race from death. In that glorious plan, all will have an opportunity to accept the provisions of redemption through Christ, obey the laws of the Messianic kingdom and live forever in the earthly home which God intended for them from the very beginning.

What glorious conditions will ultimately abound here on the earth! The prophecies tell us that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” They promise that sickness and death will be destroyed. They further assure that the righteous shall no longer suffer persecution, as has been the case during the reign of sin and death, that the “rebuke” of God’s people shall be taken away from the face of the whole earth.—Isa. 11:9; 25:6-9; 33:24

The psalmist wrote: “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people

righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.”—Ps. 67:1-6

When our first parents transgressed God’s law and were driven out of their garden home in Eden, the Lord said, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.” (Gen. 3:17,18) This “curse” is to be removed, and as the psalmist wrote, the earth will “yield her increase.” John the revelator states the matter plainly, “There shall be no more curse.” (Rev. 22:3) How reassuring are these promises of God!

God informs us, through the Prophet Isaiah, that while heaven is his throne, the earth is his “footstool,” and he will make the place of his feet—his footstool, the earth—glorious. (Isa. 66:1; 60:13) It will be then that the beautiful promise of God recorded by John, when he saw in vision “the new earth,” will have its fulfillment upon this very planet. “I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 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. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”—Rev. 21:1,3-5 ■