

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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THE END OF THE WORLD

Jonathan Kirsch, a lawyer and book critic for the Los Angeles Times, is the author of over twenty books, including his latest best seller: *A History of the End of the World*, which purports to be an explanation of the book of Revelation that, according to the jacket, is “a book that does what history is supposed to do: It both deepens our understanding and broadens our perspective of Revelation.” After reading the book we are made to wonder if Kirsch has ever read the Book of Revelation. He advocates the same old stereotyped, threadbare proposition that the world is going to come to an end and be destroyed. This has been a favorite theme of most soothsayers of the second advent for centuries and is the sacred belief of most church people today.

Kirsch opens the first chapter of the book with these words: “Human beings of all faiths, in all times and all places, have wondered when and how the world will come to an end. Nowadays, of course, the very same questions are being asked (and answered) by scientists rather than theologians. For the Christian ‘the ending’ refers to a scenario that is described in horrific and heart-shaking detail in the single scariest book of all scripture, the book of Revelation.” His last words recorded in the last chapter reads: “We all seem to agree, somehow and some time, sooner or later, whether by the hand of God or the hand of humankind or the mindless workings of the cosmos, the earth itself and all living things upon it will pass away. We are compelled to decide how to make sense of our lives as we continue to wait for the world to end on time.”

Although none of the Apostles speak of the end of the world (as we will show later in this article), soon after the Apostolic era, the (so called) “Church Fathers” spoke of the end of time. We quote David W. Bercot’s *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, a history of the writings of Bishops immediately after the first century: “Jesus is the first one to provide any information about the end of the world when he says: ‘the heavens and earth will pass away.’ So, he points out that the heavens and earth are perishable and must come to an end” *Origen 185-255 AD*. “The end of the world comes suddenly” *Cyprian 250 AD*. “After the thousand years are over (within which period is completed the resurrection of the saints, who rise sooner or later according to their desserts), there will follow the destruction of the world and the burning of all things. We will then be instantly changed into the substance of angels, by being clothed with an incorruptible nature. And we will be removed to the kingdom of heaven” *Tertullian 160 AD*. “So, it will at the end time; there will be a flood of fire and the earth will be burned up” *Melito 170 AD*. “As to the burning up of the world, it is a foolish error to deny that fire will fall upon it in an unforeseen way, or to deny it will be destroyed by fire...who will question the fact that things that had a beginning will perish? All created things must come to an end” *Mark Minucius Felix 194 AD*.

These passages show the religious world was subjected to the teachings of the end of the world at a very early age in religious history and has continued from these days noted to the present

when the subject has become a money-making project for the purveyors of fascinating (and untrue) books of prophecy, glibly snatched up by religious people unaware of what the Bible teaches on the subject. We mention two of the most popular soothsayers of the second advent: Hal Lindsay and Tim La Hay. Jack Van Impe, popular Bible prophecy teacher said the world would end between “2001 and 2012.” In 1926 Oswald J. Smith, a leading missionary statesman of his day set the date of the Antichrist and Armageddon as 1933. Then there is, of course, Hal Lindsey’s best-selling prophecy books beginning with *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1977 in which he warned readers to “make no plans beyond 1985,” and continuing with his latest works of fiction, saying the same things, only changing the dates. John F. Walvoord, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary authored the book *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crises* in 1974 and revised it in 1990 to correct some false prophesies, predicted that a ten-nation Mediterranean confederacy was about to arise whose leader would force Israel to make peace with the Arabs and this, he wrote “will mark the end of the time of the Gentiles and the beginning of the final years of history.” What more can we say about Chuck Smith (1981), Edgar Wisenant (1988 then 1989), Charles Dyer (Oct. 28, 1992), Herold Camping (1984) and a host of other date-setters and prophets of doom and the latest: *Left Behind* series. Soothsayers have done damage to immature believers and many have been wounded by numerous false predictions. One other presenting a tantalizing tale of the terrestrial is Televangelist Jim Bakker. On the website *christianpost.com* was a post declaring: “Jim Bakker says Christians can survive end of world by buying his condos and \$150 water bottles.” The article continues: “Controversial televangelist Jim Bakker has claimed that the Missouri town in which he is building a Christian community is equipped to survive the end of the world, and is selling survival gear, such as packs of bottles that cost \$150, that are designed using a combination of both Advanced and Radiological filters. He says, ‘various prophets have predicted that there is a major world disaster and humankind faces the end of the world, people in large cities are not going to be able to survive.’ That is why for 15 years Bakker has been building his Morningside community in Blue Eye, Missouri, which comes with an amphitheater, houses for the residents, and a chapel that can be used for weddings.” And we thought the false prognosticative prophets mentioned above were ridiculous!

Twice after the flood God promised not to destroy the world: Gen. 8:21b-22: “I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” Notice God says: “while the earth remains.” How long is the earth going to remain? Ecclesiastes 1:4: “A generation comes and a generation goes, but *the earth remains forever*.” The reason for the general belief throughout the years that the world will some day end is due to a mistranslation of the word “world” in the King James Version of the Bible. The Greek word for world is *kosmos*, which means “the physical earth,” and the word age is *aionos*, meaning “an unbroken age. perpetuity of time, eternity...the period of consummation at the return of Christ.” (From: *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

We do not understand how both these words could be translated “world”. Note some Scripture that shows the inconsistency of the KJV translators: Matthew 13, the parable of the sower. Verse 13:38: “The field is the world” (*kosmos*); verse 39: “the harvest is the end of the world” (*aiōnos*); verse 40, 49: “so shall it be in the end of the world” (*aiōnos*). Six times in the Gospel of Matthew the word *aiōnos* (age) is translated world: Matt. 12:32; 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20. Another example of inconsistency: Hebrews 9:26: “For then he must have suffered from the foundation of the world (*kosmos*); but now once in the end of the world (*aiōnos*) hath he appeared to put away sin.” On this verse Dr. Gary North in his book *Rapture Fever* writes: “Notice the phrase: ‘in the end of the world.’ In the original Greek, it reads: ‘completion of the ages.’ This phrase must be taken literally, but its literal frame of reference was the fall of Jerusalem and the annulment of the temple’s sacrificial system. The author was therefore prophesying the imminent end of nation Israel as God’s covenant people.” No wonder people are confused about the end of the world.

David Wells in his book *God In The Wasteland* states “in the New Testament, the term *world* has three basic meanings: 1. the earth, the created order; 2. the nations, the human community; 3. the ways of fallen humanity, alienated from God and His truth.” It is the last definition of the earth to which we give most attention in our teaching and writing, and rightly so. But the Scriptures give much attention to the first definition, the created order, and we have paid little regard to what they actually teach on this subject. There are many reasons for this neglect of the future of the world, the least which is that most churches have accepted the idea that the body will pass permanently away after death, and that we will only reappear as some type of disembodied being. Also, there is the unbiblical idea the earth doesn’t matter because we are going to go to heaven when we die and the earth is going to be destroyed. We overlook the fact that our destiny is an earthly one; a new earth, an earth redeemed and transformed, as we will see later, an earth reunited with heaven, but an earth, nevertheless.

When giving suffering Christians comfort Paul asserts: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.” (Romans 8:18-22). Not only did the sin of Adam bring a curse upon the whole human race, but the earth suffered a curse as well. Now the children of God are waiting eagerly for the redemption of their bodies (ver. 23) and the creation itself is also waiting to be redeemed (ver. 21,22). Far from being destroyed the world is going to be redeemed when the curse is taken away. Just as we receive a new body at resurrection (Eph. 1:14, I Cor. 15:38-44) so we will inherit a renewed earth on which to dwell with that body.

Not only do Christians wait for the revealing of the sons of God (Col. 3:4), the “anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19). So, man is not the sole object of Christ’s saving work. The redemption of man is a great and mighty event, but it goes beyond this. God’s plan of redemption not only reaches sinful man but extends far beyond him. The redemption of man is linked to things in heaven (Heb.

9:23; Isa. 30:26), things on earth and things under the earth (Phil.2:10). Not only is man redeemed from sin and death, the earth will be redeemed from the curse. Erich Sauer in *The King Of The Earth* quotes German theologian Karl Heim as saying: “Our human attempts to penetrate the secret of the end of the world leads us therefore to two possibilities only, both of which embrace the whole entity of reality. The first possibility is the *nothingness* in which all earthly processes come to rest, the death of the universe, which is science’s last word about the future of the world. A second possibility exists only if the resurrection message, which the messengers of the risen Lord have carried throughout the world, is in fact true. According to this message the world does not await nothingness, but the great transformation of the world.”

David, as a shepherd boy, contemplated the wonder of creation by saying: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of Thy finger, the moon and the stars, which Thou has ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him and the sons of man, that Thou dost care for him? Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God and dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet” (Psalm 8:3-8). The Hebrew writer after saying “For He did not subject to angels the world to come (marginal note *the inhabited earth*) concerning which we are speaking” he then quotes nearly verbatim the passage from Psalm 8 cited above. His conclusion then is: “For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we see him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:5-10). Since “the heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but the earth He has given to the sons of men” (Ps. 115:16), even if we do not “now see all thing subjected to him” through the death of Jesus it will come to pass, and man will realize his purpose in the world, which will never be destroyed.

God has made specific promises about the earth that assures us it will not come to an end and be destroyed. He “is not slow concerning His promise...” and “according to His promise we are looking for a new heaven and a new earth” (II Pet. 3:9, 13). We also know “He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). Consider the promise God made to Abraham: “Now the promises made to Abraham and *to his seed*. He does not say ‘And to *seeds*,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ... And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, *heirs according to promise*” (Gal. 3:16, 29). And just what was the promise God made to Abraham and his seed, of which we are heirs because we belong to Christ? Romans 4:13: “For the promise to Abraham and to his seed, that he would be *heir to the world* was not through Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Jesus confirmed this promise when he said in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall *inherit the earth*” (Matt. 5: 5). This echo’s the words of the Psalmist: “Yet a little while and the wicked will be no more...but the meek will inherit the land” (Psalm 37:10, 11). Then “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).

If God has created the earth and given it to man (Ps.115:16) then we would do well as Christians to pay attention to what the Bible teaches about the earth as the destiny of man instead of a city of gold in the sky. He did not create the earth to be destroyed.