

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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NOVEMBER 2008

WILL THE WORLD BE DESTROYED?

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 there will be “*a new heaven and a new earth,*” 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. The Scriptures lay great importance upon the creation of the earth. God is referred to as “the creator of the heavens and the earth” throughout the Scriptures. When God created the earth He looked upon His creation and four times He said “it is good” and when all his creation was finished he declared it to be “very good” (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 31). When He gave the ten commandments He refers to the six days of creation when he made the heavens and the earth (Gen. 20:11). It is said that God made a covenant between Him and the earth (Gen. 11:13). The Psalms and Prophets flourish with references to God as the one who made heaven and earth. Undergoing threats and persecution the early church prayed. The first recorded prayer of the church begins with the words, “O Lord it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them” (Acts 4:24). When Paul and Barnabas were mistaken for gods in Lystra their answer was that they “should turn from vain things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them” (Acts 14:15). One of the main points in Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill was that he was declaring the unknown god they were serving was: “the God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24). In his book *Therefore Stand* Wilber Smith comments on this verse: “The Apostle Paul began his address to the Athenian philosophers with a declaration concerning that problem (of creation) which must confront every serious-minded man who attempts to understand some of the elementary things of the universe in which he lives, the subject with which the Bible begins, because it concerns the beginning; which if rightly understood can bring infinite peace and joy and strength to the human heart. We refer, of course, to the work of the creation of this universe by God.” The importance of the earth to God is seen in the words of Erich Sauer in his book *The King Of The Earth*: “It is in the world of men that a mighty battle between light and darkness is fought out. The earth is the point where the great drama takes place, which involves good and evil angelic power, heaven and hell. The earth has thus become the stage for a mighty confrontation, for a Divine

revelation, the results of which stretch out beyond the earthly and influence God’s universe as a whole.” It is important to note that we are told not only *what* God created but *why* he created it (Gen. 1:26-30). Verse 26 reads: “Let us make man in Our *image* according to Our likeness; and let them *rule*...over all the earth.” All of this says that God created the world, the earth, for a purpose and that purpose was not that it might be destroyed.

Depending only on the King James version has given rise to many ideas and doctrines which are simply not true. The most glaring one is that the world is going to come to an end and be destroyed. Doesn’t everyone know that the world is going to come to an end and there will be the end of time? In fact most preachers are telling us that all the signs of the times point to a soon coming end of time and the world. Didn’t Jesus plainly speak of “the end of the world”? The answer is yes if you read only the King James version. In all the verses cited to prove that Jesus spoke of the end of the world (example: Matt.13:39,40,49:24:3; 28:20) the word “world” is correctly translated “age” in other versions. The passage stating that “time shall be no more” (Rev. 10:6) is correctly translated “there shall be delay no longer”. God was not going to delay the sounding of the seventh angel.

What about I John 2:17: “And the world is passing away, and also its lust, but the one who does the will of God abides forever”? John identifies the “world” as the world’s system in the words “For all that is of the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.” These things will pass away, but the earth will not be destroyed. Perhaps the main passage used to show the earth being destroyed is II Peter 3:10,12: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be *destroyed* with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be *burned up*. Since all these things are to be *destroyed* in this way what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by *burning* and the elements will melt with intense heat!” In verse 10 he uses the word *burned up* and in verse 12 he uses the word *burning*, but the word used in verse 12 is not the same word as translated *burned* in verse 10. The word in verse 10 is *discovered* and before we discount this look at Psalm 18:15: “Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were *discovered* at thy rebuke.” When David is speaking of God’s judgment he says the “foundations of the world were ‘laid bare’ or ‘discovered’”. Peter is also speaking of the judgment of God and uses the same terminology used in the Old Testament to describe this judgment. Compare verse 11 with verse 6. Speaking of the flood it is said “the world at that time was *destroyed* being flooded with water.” When God destroyed the world with water in Noah’s day the world was not annihilated. When He destroys the world by fire it will not be annihilated but cleansed. In commenting on God destroying by fire (II Pet. 3:7) Paul Marshall in *Their Blood Cries Out* states: “He is writing about the fire of judgment that destroys the sinful

and wrong and not the fire of destruction that destroys the creation. itself.” Peter is writing to a people who were versed in the writings of the Old Testament. They were Jews, “aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (I Pet. 1:1). He is not reluctant to quote from the Old Testament writings (1:16, 24; 2:6-8; 3:10-12; II Pet 2:22). He refers to events in the Old Testament with which they would be familiar (3:20; II Pet 2:4-8, 15) and mentions “the fathers” (3:1). I mention all this to show that when he uses imagery from the Old Testament they would have understood what he was talking about, something which is not easy for us to grasp. When he speaks of “the heavens passing away, elements being destroyed, the heavens destroyed by burning and elements melting with intense heat” he is using the “collapsing universe” terminology which was characteristic of the Prophet’s writing when they wrote of God’s Judgment. For example: Isaiah 13:10 speaking of the Judgment of Babylon: “For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light, the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light” Verse 13: “Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble and earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts.” In the judgment against Tyre: Isaiah 24:1-23 he says the earth is broken asunder, is split, is shaken violently, reels like a drunkard, and the moon is abashed and the sun ashamed. The judgment against Tyre is described as “the host of heaven will wear away and sky will be rolled up like a scroll...the fire shall not be quenched by day, its smoke shall go up forever” (Isa. 44:4,10). Other Scriptures in the same vein is Jeremiah 4:23-28; Psalm 18:7-10 and Isaiah 19:1. Peter’s readers would understand that the words in II Peter 3 are not speaking of the end of the world and the destruction of the earth but rather God’s judgment that, in the words of Paul Marshall “destroys the sinful and wrong.” Peter continues by stating: “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” The promise Peter is referring to is Isaiah 65:17-25 and 66:22-24.

After the flood God made this promise to Noah: “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done *while the earth remains*, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.” How long will the earth remain? Ecclesiastes 1:4: “A generation comes and a generation goes but *the earth remains forever*.” Psalm 104:5: “He established the earth upon its foundations, so that it will not totter forever and ever.” Psalm 119: 90: “Thou didst establish the earth, and it stands.” If God’s promise to Abraham was that he would be heir of the world (Rom. 4:13) and if “the meek shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5) it doesn’t seem that the earth will be destroyed.

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 does 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 every one” (Hebrews 2:5-10). Since “the heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but the earth He has given to the sons of men” 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.

If God has created the earth and given it to man (Ps.115:6) then we would do well as Christians to pay attention to what the Bible says about it. Just remember that God is the creator of the heavens and earth and this point of his being the Creator is emphasized throughout the Scriptures.

