

WORLD OF THE FUTURE

By

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In 1940 Ernest Hemingway, at the height of his literary success, wrote, “There is no future in anything.” This is the creed of the hedonist and the wail of the materialist. Philosophers and scientists project a future sapped of natural energy, scarce in food, tightly controlled by state planners and void of all the freedom and joys that make life worthwhile.

Add to this the fact of ultimate destruction in the day of judgment for all who are unredeemed and Hemingway was right, at least for a great majority of people. This world is all they know, and it is deteriorating rapidly. The result is immorality, violence, disintegration of business, government, schools, and even the home. For those without a future, this is the logical progression.

Christ, however, has called us to a future. His message took into consideration the Hemingways and their unbelief and set them in contrast to His disciples. Believers in Him, He said, “should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The great majority, He said, would travel the broad way to destruction, but a few (by comparison) would find the narrow way to eternal life. In His initial sermon (the sermon on the Mount) He promised, “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Here is a promise of future for Christians.

Perhaps the most popular promise of a future is the one recorded in John 13: “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and will receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” This emphatic and thrilling promise has been weakened and obscured by the misapplication of it at funerals, to assure the bereaved that their loved one has already gone to heaven and that the rest of us have only to live on for a while and we too shall go to heaven for an eternity of bliss.

Of course, this is not what Jesus said. His promise was that He could come again, and at that time He will receive His faithful disciples and be with them. He said not a word about heaven.

But, in spite of what He really said, the popular teaching is that the destination of the Christian is heaven at death. Thomas Carlyle said, “Popular opinion is the greatest lie in the world.” The question is, what does Scripture teach regarding our future? Many would be surprised to learn that nowhere does the Bible tell us of man’s entering heaven! Jesus said that “no man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven” (John 3:13), and Peter declared that “David is not ascended into heaven...” (Acts 2:34).

The main emphasis of Jesus was not the **place** in which man would live, but the fact that he would **live** instead of die in judgment. Jesus died to remove the death penalty so man might live. The issue was not “Where will man spend eternity?” as so many evangelists say in their effort to lead others to Christ. The issue was whether or not one would be salvaged from death in order to have life. Jesus promised, “I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world” (John 6:51). The essence of salvation is in what God did through Christ on the cross, which focuses on

turning man from a sinner doomed to death to a saint destined for life, quite different from the popular idea that all, both sinner and saint, will live forever, although in different places. Life is what's at stake, and Christ came to make it possible.

But that isn't all there is to it. There are some fantastic promises which give us a clue as to the kind of place in which God's people will live.

Peter is the apostle that writes in down-to-earth language, so there is no mistaking what he means. He explains some things about the creation that are often overlooked, and in fact willfully rejected by evolutionists. "For this they (the evolutionists) willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God; by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished; but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (II Peter 3:5-7).

Here are two worlds; one that existed before the flood, and the present world. The world "that then was" perished in the flood and the present earth is stored in such a way that at God's word it will perish by fire and with it destroy all the ungodly in the day of judgment.

The destruction will include both the heavens and the earth in a gigantic melt-down. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (Vs. 10).

That the knowledge of these facts should cause us to live holy and godly lives is the kind of conclusion we might expect Peter to make. But he adds another conclusion that is not only startling, but generally disregarded by those to whom alone it has great significance and joy. "Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved what manner of person ought you to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? But according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness" (II Peter 3:11-13).

We are to look for and earnestly desire that day of this event! Why? Because it will mean the fulfillment of the great promise made by God to Abraham, to David, then made by Christ to all His disciples, and repeated by the apostles, that there will be a new dwelling place for the redeemed, "a new earth wherein dwells righteousness."

In the beginning, after He had created the earth and all the plants and animals, God said, "It is good." It was just what God wanted, a suitable habitation for the perfect man that He placed there. But with Adam's sin also came the spoiling of the creation over which Adam had dominion., Who knows what beauty and glory that Paradise held? A perfect place for a perfect pair. It was not to be spoiled by unrighteousness. "The day thou shalt eat thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17). (Remember that it was the Devil who said, "Thou shalt not surely die," giving the basis for the pagan concept that all are immortal and none can ever die.) True to His word, God came to Adam after the sin, pronouncing judgment of both man and the earth. "Cursed is the ground for your sake...in the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, until you return unto the ground; for out of it you were taken: for dust you are and unto dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:17, 19).

The first earth had lost its righteousness and its glory, and man had lost his deathless state. Unrighteousness increased until the first earth was destroyed.

Now we see the deterioration of the present world. God warns us, “Love not the world” for the world and all its lust is passing away (I John 2:17).

Truly, from the ground of a person who has no faith in Christ and thus no promise from Him, “there is no future.”

For this reason, Christians may truthfully sing, “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through.” Like Abraham we “look for the city which has the foundations whose builder and maker is God” and like him confess that we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:10, 13). Our future is the world yet to come.

The new earth is not described in detail in Scripture. There are only hints and glimpses. In the Revelation is the promise, “To him that overcomes, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). After the sin, man was driven from the original Paradise “lest he put forth his hand and take of the tree of life and live forever” (Gen. 3:22). No eternal sinners in God’s perfect garden! But in the world to come, the new Paradise restored, all will be righteous, and the tree of life will be provided for all.

There will be no death nor sorrow of any kind, for the curse is removed (Rev. 21:4, 22:3–4). Paul had this new world in mind when he wrote, “For I reckon that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God...that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:18, 19, 21).

John writes of a new heaven and a new earth, with the Holy City — the glorious Church which includes all the saints — coming from heaven to the new earth where God is said to dwell with them (Rev. 21:1–3). Instead of the traditional idea of the saints going to live in heaven, the Biblical scenario has God coming to live with His people in the new creation.

It is true that we are to “lay up treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19–20) and that the righteous have a great reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:10, 12). But it is also true that we do not go to heaven to get these blessings. “Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me” (Rev. 22:12).

Even though one’s name is written in heaven, his treasure is in heaven and his “citizenship is in heaven,” he does not receive these at death nor does he go to heaven to get them. Jesus will bring the reward when He comes again. At that time the dead will be raised, the unsaved will be judged and the resurrected saints will be clothed in immortality. The present will be destroyed — along with the unredeemed — and the new heavens and earth brought into reality for the eternal abode of the righteous.

The world tries to evade the reality of death and the ultimate end of the present creation. The church has offered a variety of indefinite non-Biblical ideas about what lies beyond. Because of the uncertainty of the future people seek answers in spiritism, astrology and witchcraft.

But Jesus gives us a real future, he did not promise to take you to heaven, but He promised to give life through a resurrection to a powerful, deathless, and glorious body (I Cor. 14:42–44) and the reality of a new world!

This is the good news: life in a world to come.

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