

Let The Bible Speak Series

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The End Of All Things

Good morning and welcome to Let The Bible Speak. It is good to have you with us today. We always appreciate the opportunity to come into your home and study with you about things that make for a better life here and an even better one in the world to come. Today I want to direct your attention to 1Peter 4:7 "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers." The meaning of this phrase has been the subject of much dispute. Some commentators affirm that it is a direct reference to the speedy return of Christ, and go so far as to claim that both Christ and the apostles believed and taught the idea. Careful examination, however, seems to clearly indicate that neither Christ nor the apostles taught or believed that the second advent would occur in their generation or at a time immediately in the future.

(1) Jesus declared that he himself did not know the day nor hour (Mt.24:36) of his return. This being the case, it is certain that no apostle could know.

(2) Christ said "Whosoever the gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, that also which this woman hath done (Mary's anointing) shall be spoken of for a memorial of her" (Mark 14:9). Preaching the gospel in the whole world was a task involving generations and centuries, not merely a lifetime.

(3) Christ, in an analogy spoken in the parable of the talents, said "Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh" (Mt.25:19); there is nothing here that speaks of any "speedy return."

(4) Paul evidently did not expect the second coming in his lifetime, since he spoke of his own resurrection from the dead along with the resurrection of all the Corinthians, as an event scheduled for the future (2Cor.4:14). Furthermore, his saying, "We shall not all sleep" (1Cor. 15:51) refers to the ultimate fact of Christians who may be alive at the coming of the Lord, and not either to himself or the Corinthians of his generation.

(5) In his letters to the Thessalonians, written before the Corinthian letters, Paul affirmed that "the coming shall not be except the apostasy come first" (Thess.2:3), and the apostasy was understood to involve a great amount of time. The weight of scriptural evidence is against the idea of anyone knowing the time of the Lord's second return. The temptation, however, to speculate about it has been so great that a number of men have ventured to predict it. William Miller, the founder of Seventh Day Adventism, predicted that Christ would return in 1843. Disappointed, he revised his figures and set the time at October 22, 1844. When this failed, he could see that he had been wrong. And it should be said to his credit that he, at that time, withdrew from the field of religious leadership. He wrote: "We expected the second coming of Christ at this time, and now to contend that we were not mistaken is dishonest. I have no confidence in any new theories that grew out of the movement." (Quoted by Cantright in his book Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced, p.77) Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, also prophesied about the

second coming of Christ. He wrote: "The coming of the Lord which was nigh even fifty-six years should wind up the scenes." (Millennial Star, Vol. 15, p. 205) Charles T. Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witness sect, said: "That the Lord must be present and set up his kingdom and exercise his power so as to dash the nations to pieces as a potter's vessel before A. D. 1914 is then clearly fixed." (Millennial Dawn, Vol.2 p. 170) When this prophecy failed, he tried to justify it by saying that Christ came, but the world did not see him. Such excuses only underscore the futility of predicting what the Lord has clearly taught no man knows.

The reason some believe in a "speedy return" is due to such passages as Romans 13:12, "The Lord is at hand." Phil. 4:5, "The coming of the Lord is at hand." James 5:8, "It is the last hour." 1John 2:18, "The time is near" Rev.1:3. All of these passages were undoubtedly written to inspire watchfulness and preparedness on the part of Christians, rather than teach that the second coming of Jesus was an imminent event. It must be remembered that if these scriptures do teach that Jesus is coming in the near future, they have been teaching it for nearly two thousand years. What then is the meaning of "...the end of all things is at hand? The meaning of the phrase literally is "of all things the end draws near." But what end? As we have already noticed it cannot be the end of the world and judgment day. Such an interpretation would make Peter a liar, since two thousand years have passed since the statement was made. These words were written on the eve of the destruction of the Jewish state. The law with its worship, feast days, and ceremonies had been terminated by the death of Christ. However unbelieving Jews, in their resistance to Christianity, had persisted in teaching and binding the law. Soon the temple and Jewish economy would perish in the destruction that was to fall upon Jerusalem. The end was in sight, and with it would come trial and persecution "for all, and particularly those who had espoused a religion traceable to Jews" (Woods). Unfortunately Christians would also suffer, along with the unbelieving Jews, because of the doom that would soon befall the Jewish state. Thus in following verses, we have Peter's admonitions regarding how they should conduct themselves.

The Fiery Trial?

1Peter 4:12-13 "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: But insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; That at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy." Peter had dealt with the suffering of the saints from time to time throughout this epistle. (See 1Peter 1:3-9) The idea of this verse is to point out that such suffering is not alien to their lot as Christians. In fact according to 2Timothy 3:12 it was to be expected. The "fiery trial" was a reference to the impending persecutions that would be associated with the coming destruction of the Jewish state. Some writers (Coffman among them) feel that "the fiery trial" could refer to the "shameless burnings of Christians to illuminate the gardens of Nero..." He felt that these persecutions, might have already begun at the time of this writing, and preceded the events that would occur when Rome marched against Jerusalem. He further stated: "The Neroian persecution broke against the Christians, sending countless thousands of them to

their flaming death as torches to light the orgies in Nero's gardens, or feed the wild beasts in the Coliseum, or to be crucified, tortured, burned alive, beheaded, or suffer any other horrible death that the pagan mind could invent. All earthly possessions of Christians perished in that holocaust. The Jews made an insurrection against Rome; and following the death of Nero, the pagan emperor organized a war of extermination against them. Jerusalem was utterly destroyed, some 1,100,000 of its populations including Jews throughout the area being butchered by the Romans. Thirty thousand young Jewish males were crucified upon the walls of the ruined city, the lumber stores being exhausted to supply crosses..." McGarvey quotes Josephus as follows: "The emperor Vespasian, and his son Titus, after a three years' siege, took Jerusalem and destroyed its temple A. D. 70. Of the temple proper not a vestige was left standing, but the vast platform upon which it stood composed partly of natural rock and partly of immense masonry, was for the most part left standing. The destruction of the city and temple, however, was so complete that those who visited could hardly believe that it had ever been inhabited."

Scarcely Saved versus Abundant Entrance

1Peter 4:18 "For the time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God: And if it begin first at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?"

Peter affirms that "it is the season" for judgment (severe trial) to begin at the house of God or the church. The judgment of 2Cor.5:10 could not be the meaning here since it has been almost two thousand years since Peter penned these words, and the judgment spoken of was impending and at hand. The "end" of them that obey not the gospel, refers to the doom that awaits those to whom he referred. The meaning is that if the church is soon to fall into this fiery trial and severe persecution, how much greater will be the suffering and wretchedness of those who do not rely on the Lord. Those who have not the promise and comfort of the gospel. The righteous scarcely saved. Scarcely means that something is to be accomplished "with great difficulty." No doubt is expressed as to outcome, but that such a thing is possible. A righteous man is one who keeps the commandments of God. The idea expressed by Peter is simply that the trial and suffering would be so great that even the pure and good would with great difficulty escape the destruction which it threatened. If this is the case with the righteous, then what of the sinner and ungodly? The judgment soon to begin does not refer to the general judgment for the following reasons:

1. The general judgment was then and still may be in the distant future.
2. In this judgment the righteous will scarcely be saved; whereas, the deliverance of the righteous in the last day and their entrance into the heavenly kingdom will be richly supplied

"Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (2Peter1:10-11).

3. Since the same writer declares that the "righteous will scarcely be saved" and faithful shall be "richly supplied" with an entrance to heaven, it follows that he does not refer in these passages to the same salvation. What then is the salvation referred to in our text? We have already learned from this writer of a "trial" and "extreme suffering." This trial

was to soon come upon the saints. There was an "end" approaching, which necessitated a sound mind. They were to also be "sober in prayer." In this coming disaster they would "scarcely" be saved. We believe the reference is to the impending destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. The terrible effects of this trial would extend into the remotest sections of the earth. Note the similarity between the words of Peter and those of Mt. 24:1-28 especially verse 22 "And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Hence the salvation under consideration was the deliverance from complete destruction in the persecution which swept over the world in connection with the destruction of the temple and the Jewish state in Jerusalem