

God's Answers For Today

into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Matthew 25:31-34, 41.

Of course, the Lord is mindful of His sleeping saints when He returns in glory. At the sound of His trumpet they are miraculously awakened from the long sleep of death. Wherever they are, regardless of their condition, or of how scattered their remains might be, they respond at once to the Master's clarion call. Their bodies are instantaneously remade, immortalized, and glorified, and they rise in triumph to greet their King. (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16) But the rest of the dead—those who died in their sins and who therefore are unqualified for eternal life—will sleep on for a thousand years, until the second resurrection. (Revelation 20:5.)

The righteous people who are alive when Christ comes will also be changed. Their bodies will undergo a wonderful process of glorification, and they will be caught up together with the risen dead, "to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:17. (1 Corinthians 15:50-54) Jesus had this whole glorious scene in mind when He said to Martha of Bethany: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. [Here is the promise of the resurrection of the righteous dead.] And whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. [Here He promised translation from mortal life to immortal life to the saints who are living at the time of His Second Advent.] John 11:25, 26.

At Christ's coming then, the world will be completely abandoned by the saints, for they will be taken to heaven to be with the Lord. The unrighteous dead, as we have already seen, sleep on for a thousand years; while the unrighteous living, unable to withstand the presence of Christ, will have been slain by the brightness of His glory. Paul visualized this tragic scene when he wrote: "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God." 2 Thessalonians 1:7,8. (Luke 17:26-30.) Thus will the world be wholly depopulated and desolate. In this condition it will remain for the millennial period of one thousand years.

A somber scene indeed, yet one that was visualized by Isaiah and Jeremiah of old. Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty, and makes it waste. Isaiah 24:1-3. (See also Jeremiah 4:23-28.) "For thus hath the Lord said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end." Jeremiah 4:27. The "full end" of sin will be made, as we shall see in a later chapter, at the close of the thousand-year period. The day of the Lord will be a day of impressive contrasts—a day of desolation and tragedy, yet one of surpassing joy and gladness. John visualizes the multitudes who see Christ come, but who are unready. They hide themselves in terror. In anguish they pray for the rocks to fall on them. "Fall on us" they cry, "for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Revelation 6:14-17.

From this harassing scene, we turn to that other scene which, by God's grace, will embrace each one of us. Faithful Christians who have stood loyally for the Lord will look upward, not with anguish or fear, but with joy and gladness. They will welcome their returning King with the words: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us." Isaiah 25:9.

Is Christ's Coming Near?

ON one of the many occasions when He found it necessary to rebuke the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, Jesus said: "You can discern the face of the sky; but can You not discern the signs of the times?" Matthew 16:3. Somehow they were willingly blind to the host of signs which clearly told that they were living in the time of Christ's first advent signs which showed that Jesus was, in fact, the long-looked-for Messiah. This was unpardonable for religious leaders whose duty it was to read and expound the prophecies. Sad it is that similar reluctance to read the signs will be evident in the last days. But the signs will be there, nevertheless. In God's providence, no time was to be more replete with signs than the "time of the end," just before Jesus comes.

First and foremost is the fact that the many great prophecies such as that of the image of Daniel two, and the beasts of Daniel seven and eight, and the prophecies of the seven churches, the seven seals, and seven trumpets of Revelation, all show that the next major event to complete the fulfillment of their predictions, is that of Christ's Second Coming. As Spurgeon once remarked: "Nine-tenths of these prophecies have already been accurately fulfilled; what fools we would be to disregard that remaining one-tenth which tells of the coming of Christ." Without exception, these prophecies compel us to the wonderful conclusion that the advent is almost here.

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As time gets shorter the devil's wrath soars, and his death struggle activities reach their peak. (Revelation 12:12) The many evidences of these activities clearly tell that we are in "the last days." At this time, says Paul, "perilous times shall come. ... Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters ... disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despising of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers, of pleasures more than lovers of God. Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." 2 Timothy 3:1-5. A long and woeful list! It needs no emphasis that we have reached this time of unparalleled peril; a time when men's word cannot be depended on. When nations and individuals are falsely accused and their motives distorted when cinemas and theatres attract great queues of people who will brave all weathers, while the churches are comparatively empty; when orthodox religion is largely void of vital power. Such conditions do indeed cause concern and grief; but they nevertheless, prove that we are living in the "last days."

Jesus added many signs to the list. He said there should be "upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Luke 21:25-27. Thus did the Lord portray a scene of unparalleled distress such as our atomic age has ushered in. At this time, says the Lord, "Look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws nigh." Verse 28. Truly, the end is in sight.

Another outstanding sign of the "time of the end," according to the prophet Daniel, would be the increase of knowledge and the fact that "many shall run to and fro," an obvious reference to the vastly improved means of transport of our times. (Daniel 12:4.) This last one hundred years has seen a phenomenal advance in knowledge and applied science, compared with which all that went before was meager indeed. We think of medical science which has increased life's expectation threefold, and which has given us such blessings as anesthetics, wonder drugs, X-rays, radium, plastic surgery, etc. We think of the cinema, radio, and television-undreamed of, one hundred years ago. We think of advance in the textile industry which has given us relatively cheaper and better clothes and such wonder materials as rayon, nylon etc. We think of industrial advance generally which has immensely raised the standard of living. Until 1600, transport in England, as elsewhere, was by horseback or waterways. Then came the development of the long-distance stage coach. 1700 brought better roads and speedier travel. By 1830 railways were coming into general use, and they virtually eclipsed road transport until 1895, when motor cars and electric road vehicles came on the scene. Finally came airplanes which can now convey us to the ends of the earth in a matter of hours. As a result of all this, the tempo, the standard, and the efficiency of life today is such as would stagger any earlier age. Yet all is in fulfillment of prophecy, and constitutes one of the greatest signs that Christ's coming is near.

Undoubtedly this scientific advance will be largely responsible for fulfilling a more hopeful sign of the end. Jesus said: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matthew 24:14. Modern publishing methods, radio, television, and modern transport have given to the Gospel wings which must very soon carry it to earth's remotest bounds. When all have been given the opportunity of hearing the Gospel appeal, then the end will come.

Hosts of other signs such as wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilence, the rise of organized labor etc, all tell that the devil is vehemently busy, and that the end is very, very near. (Matthew 24:7; James 5:4-8)

Mr. Spurgeon, that great soul-winner of last century, once remarked: "Our Lord may come right soon; certain signs raise our hopes very high. The love of many waxes cold, and the devil is doubly busy; and this last is no doubtful sign. When you see a farmer beginning to burn the gates and break down the hedges, and unroof the barns, And so on, you say: 'That fellow's lease is run out.' Satan has great wrath when he knows that his time is short. In the case of the demoniac child, we read, 'As he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down and tare him.' He knew that he was about to be expelled, and so did his worst. The double veiling of the heavens only brings on that darkest part of the night which precedes the dawn of day. When the tale of bricks is doubled Moses appears, and the same is true of our still greater Deliverer. Let us take courage and be of good heart; for while we lift Christ on high, and glorify His name, He is on the way to take up the quarrel of His covenant and rout His foes."

Truly, with the prophets of old we can solemnly, confidently, joyfully say: "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hastens greatly." "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Zephaniah 1:14; Revelation 22:20.