

God's Answers For Today

In God's "hand is the soul of every living thing.... With Him is strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver are His. He leads counselors away spoiled, and makes the judges fools. He looses the bond of kings, and girds their loins with a girdle. He leads princes away spoiled, and overthrows the mighty. He increases the nations, and destroys them: He enlarged the nations, and straightens them again." Job 12:10, 16-19,23.

But is not the rise of such callous and powerful tyrants as Nero, or Attila, or a great many others which perhaps more readily come to our minds, an indication that God has left men and nations generally to their own devices? Happily, this is not so. It has ever been true, and ever will be, "that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the basest of men." Daniel 4:17. Indeed, as Jeremiah asked: "Who is he that said, and it comes to pass, when the Lord commands it not?" "Lamentations 3:37.

Though the acts of evil men are never in harmony with God's will, yet are they always overruled and controlled by God to serve His ultimate purpose. And His purpose is that men may turn to the Lord Jesus, and that the faith of His followers may be tested and established. As Paul has it: "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him." Acts 17:24-27.

"God is the King of all the earth. God reigns over the heathen: God sits upon the throne of His holiness." Psalm 47:7, 8. His controlling hand is shaping all things in preparation for the great and glorious consummation.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE

Will Christ Come Again?

THE greatest event of the ages will be the Second Coming of Jesus. This will be the glorious consummation of the history of the world. It will virtually bring to an end the bloodthirsty conflict between good and evil, truth and error. Before we turn to the Lord's specific answer to this question, however, let us bear in mind that without the Second Coming of Jesus His work for this world is not, nor ever can be, perfected. On His cross, Jew paid the full price for our redemption. His saving grace which was thereby made available for us is able to save us from the guilt of sin and, which is equally important, from the power of sin. (1 John 1:9.) But not until we are saved from the very presence of sin will our Lord's work be done.

His plan of salvation therefore includes a complete cleaning up of this world. For He has made our world, not to be an eternal plague spot, or the citadel of sin where Satan holds dominion, but a delectable dwelling-place where His creatures may abide in happiness and eternal security. "Thus said the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited." Isaiah 45:18. Unless something really colossal takes place, this plan of God will be frustrated. Such is humanity's moral decline in spite of its scientific progress, that future prospects would seem to hold little but atomic calamity which will render the world not only uninhabited, but uninhabitable. The alternative to such a doomed world, the mighty event which will bring the long-looked-for change, is the Second Coming of Christ. This Second Coming is essential as the first great step in His marvelous plan to provide "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness." 2 Peter 3:13.

Will Christ come again? How can we doubt it in view of His own promise to His discouraged disciples shortly before He ascended to heaven? He said: "Let not your heart be troubled: You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there You may be also." John 14:1-3.

Will Christ come again? How can we doubt it in view of the promise of the angels at His ascension? To that disheartened group which stood on Olivet's summit, straining their eyes to catch a last glimpse of their ascending Lord. The angel said This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven,

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shall so come in like manner as You have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1:11. Neither the promises of Jesus nor of this angel have yet been fulfilled. Sin still reigns. Morality plumbs deeper levels. Doomsday looms ever larger. Fear and perplexity have supplanted peace and security. Joy and goodness have virtually vanished. Truly the time is ripe for Christ to come.

The prophecy of Daniel chapter two declares that Christ will come. The metal image which King Nebuchadnezzar saw was finally smashed and pulverized by a stone which was hurled at its feet of iron and clay. This remarkable stone was cut from the rock "without hands," and after destroying the image, it "became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:34,35. This is the one phase of Daniel's thrilling prophecy which has not yet happened. Today, we are living in the era of history symbolized by the image's feet of iron and clay that of a disunited, quarrelling world. We await the next development, something which is indeed spectacular, and without the slightest parallel in past history-the smiting by the stone. The meaning of this is thus explained by Daniel: "In the days of these kings [the divided nations as we have them today] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed. And the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." Daniel 2:44. (See also verse 45)

The stone kingdom is Christ's kingdom. The stone's shattering impact on the image depicts Christ's mighty advent in glory when worldly powers will be laid low. The reign of tyranny will cease forever.

Christ's Second Coming is the climax of many other prophecies. Daniel, like Nebuchadnezzar was given visions of world history. His vision of chapter seven covered the same period, and the world powers-Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome were aptly displayed under the imagery of the lion, for strength and glory (Babylon); the bear for rapacity (Medo-Persia); the winged leopard for speed (Greece); and the nondescript monster for extreme brutality (Rome). Divided Europe, as we have had it since Rome's decline and fall, was shown by the symbolism of the ten horns upon the head of the fourth beast. (Daniel 7:2-7,17-20, 23, 24)

Were the prophecy to end here, it would be void of hope for humanity. Happily it carries us forward to the great climax of the ages when "the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him." Daniel 7:27.

Christ's Second Coming has been the hope of all ages. Enoch looked for it (Jude 14, 15), Job was comforted by it (Job 19:25), David cherished it (Psalm 102:16), Isaiah wrote of it (Isaiah 35:4; 25:9), Paul longed for it (1 Thessalonians 2:19; Hebrews 10:37). James hoped for it (James 5:8). Peter joyfully anticipated it (1 Peter 5:4; 2 Peter 1:4-6), and John's writings all focus their prophetic beams upon it. (Revelation 6:12-17; 14:14, 15; 22:20,21) Christ's coming is the "blessed hope" of the church (Titus 2:13), for it will not only solve all of our problems, but it will bring us face to face with "Him who loved us," and "gave Himself for us."

Our hearts surely thrill with new hope and joy as we realize that Christ's Second Coming is the plan and promise of the one true "God, that cannot lie." Titus 1:2.

How Will Christ Come?

BECAUSE of the supreme importance of Christ's Second Coming, it is to be expected that Satan will seek to blind men's eyes to its true nature. Almost every error we can think of has a bearing, directly or indirectly, on Jesus' Second Advent. Such errors have one of two effects: either that of distorting or misinterpreting the facts of that great event, or that of representing it as meaningless, irrelevant, or impossible. In both cases the consequence is to unfit men and women to face the realities of that day. So we do well to acquaint ourselves with the facts.

As the prophecy of King Nebuchadnezzar's image ably shows, Christ's Second Coming will be overwhelming and spectacular. just as that divine stone which smote the image brought it crashing down, so will the intervention of Christ be world-shattering in its effect. (Daniel 2:44, 45) Said the Psalmist: "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him." Psalm 50:3. "The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the hope of His people." Joel 3:16.

Jesus described His Second Coming thus: "As the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even

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unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Matthew 24:27, 30.

From these descriptions it is dear that the return of Jesus will be no secret, not something witnessed by a favored few, nor an invisible thing whose spiritual nature can be realized only by enlightened believers. "Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him" is John's assurance. (Revelation 1:7)

As He ascended on clouds, so will He return on clouds. (Acts 1:9-11.) As He ascended with a physical, tangible-though glorified-body (Luke 24:39), so will "this same Jesus" return, literally, bodily, visibly, audibly. But at His return, His majestic glory will be augmented by that of the angel host. "He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." Luke 9:26.

Says Paul: "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God." 1 Thessalonians 4:16. When this old world reverberates to the clarion call of that trumpet, we will know that God's great plan of the ages is about to be consummated. It will sound the eternal death knell to sin and suffering. It will thrill the hearts of His waiting followers who know that deliverance-eternal deliverance-has come.

There is, however, a striking and somber fact about the coming of Christ. Because of general reluctance to read the signs of the times, it will come to the world as an overwhelming surprise. "Be You therefore ready also," is Jesus' merciful warning, "for the Son of man comes at an hour when You think not!" Luke 12:40.

"But You, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." 1 Thessalonians 5:44

What Will Happen When Christ Returns?

CHRIST'S MOST important purpose when He comes again will be to bestow appropriate rewards. Jesus said, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works." Matthew 16:27. "And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:12.

Some visualize this great day of the Lord as a time when the world will be converted, and when all men everywhere will humbly acknowledge the just right of Christ to rule. But the Bible portrays no such picture. Its message throughout emphasizes rather the solemn fact that "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Corinthians 6:2. Those who are hoping for a future probation, or for a second chance, will be unhappily disillusioned. When Christ comes, rewards for weal or woe will already have been decided.

In God's sight there are really only two groups of people in this world-righteous and unrighteous, saints and sinners, believers and unbelievers. Of these two, the saints are, sad to say, in the minority. Jesus said, "Enter You in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it." Matthew 7:13, 14. Just two ways! The way of life, and the way of destruction. The narrow way and the broad. The uphill way of faith and obedience, and the popular way of easy self-indulgence.

These two classes are variously spoken of as the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares. Both classes, it is said, are to live and labor and grow together till Christ comes. Then will come separation, not universal conversion. In God's merciful providence, tares may now be transformed into wheat, goats may become sheep, the bad may be cleansed and ennobled in order to take their place among the good. But when Christ comes, the transforming process will have ceased, and rewards will be given according to whichever class we are in. (Matthew 13:38-43; 25:31-46.)

"When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, before Him shall be gathered all nations. And He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to them on His right hand, Come, You blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Then shall He say also unto them in the left hand, Depart from Me, You cursed,

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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.