

The End

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The end.

In saying those two little words, I bet that most of you immediately thought of, "That is the end of the story." A story often begins with, "Once upon a time," or something along that line, and concludes with, "And they lived happily ever after. The end." This enduring convention has become an appealing part of our popular culture.

Perhaps you thought, "Well, he just reminded us that this is the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, and it is rapidly approaching that time when we will all have to go home."

Since this crowd is made up of mostly religious people, if you did not think of this typical story ending, or if you did not think about the time to go home, maybe you thought of the "end of the age," "the time of the end," or "the last days." You may have imagined that scary-looking man with a scraggly beard holding a sign up walking around the city, saying, "The end is near!"

You may have imagined a mushroom cloud on the horizon or the devastation from terrible plagues, as is in the book of Revelation. Possibly you thought of vast armies marching toward Armageddon. Maybe you remembered the video of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," aired on our *World Tomorrow* telecast over twenty years ago. That was pretty cutting edge technology for the time; they were pretty scary. I was still there at Ambassador College and in the Worldwide Church of God at the time.

In fact, the Bible speaks of several "the ends" within its pages. If you think about it, it is not hard to imagine that Noah's Flood was the end for millions of people in that age. The prophets speak of the falls of Israel and Judah as a time of the end for them. Much of the imagery comes from the invading armies and the problems that were happening in Israel and Judah at the time.

Paul speaks of the fall of Jerusalem that would happen in A.D. 70 using end-time terms. It was an end—something that had been ongoing for years in the history of Judah, especially, as it was concluding. The temple would be destroyed, and that would all come to an end.

Of course, you cannot forget there is the end of the age and the coming of the Son of Man in power and glory with His saints. That is usually the end of which we think. That is the end toward which we, with this world, are all hurtling, even now.

However, there is still another "the end" in scripture. It is the one that, most years, we speak about only on this specific day, the Last Great Day. That is "the end" I would like to consider today. This is the end that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong in his book, *Mystery of the Ages*, called "the beginning." This is the time that we need to contemplate on the Last Great Day.

In sum, if we were to put it all down in front of us, the Bible does not contain a great deal of information about this post-Great White Throne Judgment period that I am calling "the end."

What we actually know about it—really know about it with certainty—is fairly sketchy in itself. However, God has left us a few tantalizing clues.

Obviously, everything that we "know" about this time period is told in prophetic language in the prophecies—and prophetic language is characteristically full of symbols and imagery. We do not know when to take some of it literally or symbolically or spiritually, but we do have a vague idea of what it is all about.

Usually a prophet (like Isaiah in the eighth century BC or Ezekiel in the sixth century BC, or the apostle John in the first century AD) would see something in a vision. Then this prophet, using his limited experience, knowledge, and vocabulary, would describe it the best he knew how with what he had. For all we know, this process of God giving a prophet a vision and asking him to describe it for us for all time would be like asking a grade school student to describe molecular biology. The student would do his best, but how much information could he get across? Maybe it is not molecular biology but, rather, particle physics or quantum mechanics. Whatever it is, it is way beyond our knowledge. It would certainly be so for these prophets of the Old Testament who did not have, perhaps, the full revelation of God, such as we have in the pages of our Bibles. They just did the best they could.

Maybe I am all wet on that. Perhaps the visions were exactly as they were described in the Bible, and He made them purposefully vague and symbolic because that was all we really needed to know about it at this time. Who knows? Maybe knowing more about that time would be harmful to us. Maybe it would be distracting. Maybe it would put us off in some way. God has all wisdom and knows exactly what we need, and He has only given us a little bit.

These first two passages through which we will go are among the earliest mentions, if not the earliest mention, of this end time.

Isaiah 51:6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished.

Psalms 102:24-26 ...Your years are throughout all generations. Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will endure; yes, they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed.

These two early mentions of this time have the basic idea that the heavens will ultimately be destroyed or changed. It says that they grow old like a garment, and then it says that, like a cloak, God will change them. God is forever, but the heavens and the earth, seemingly so sound and enduring, will pale in comparison. God will keep on going, but the earth is going to be replaced.

That is the idea here. When you take off some garment and put it into the clothes hamper, you

get something new or different out and put that on. You do not take something off and then put it right back on, do you? That is not the idea here. It is not refurbishing by polishing up the old. The idea here is replacing by getting rid of the old and putting the new on—having a new thing.

This next section is the basis for what John sees in Revelation 21:

Isaiah 65:17-19 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying."

Since there is so much corroborating evidence in the New Testament about this particular section, it was surprising to see how much controversy this passage has caused among commentators. For instance, I just pulled this out of Adam Clarke, and his confusion was just astounding! Listen to this:

This has been variously understood. Some Jews and some Christians understand it literally. God shall change the state of the atmosphere, and render the earth more fruitful. Some refer it to with what they call the Millennium; others to a glorious state of religion; others to the recreation of the earth after it shall have been destroyed by fire.

I think that it refers to the full conversion of the Jews, ultimately, and primarily to the deliverance from the Babylonian captivity.

Is that not astounding? It shows absolutely no understanding whatsoever of God's plan. Usually, Adam Clarke is pretty good. I usually like his commentary, but he was totally befuddled by this passage. Clearly, the interpretations are all over the map, but the Bible provides its own interpretation in the New Testament, as I have been saying, and in more than one place, too.

It seems plain, in going back to Isaiah 65:17-19, that these three verses stand on their own within the chapter. They are a separate paragraph, you might say. In terms of timing, in terms of God's plan, they occur after the end of this particular chapter—after verse 25. It would have been nice had we had been able to move it as we do in some word processor and insert it below verse 25 to put everything in its right order. However, God did not do it that way. He put it before verse 20.

What it seems to me is that just Revelation 20, with the binding of Satan and the 1000-year reign of the saints with Christ and the rebellion at the end of that period and the Great White Throne Judgment period, is all in chronological order as far as we know, and then comes Revelation 21 and the new heavens and the new earth. The correct chronology is in Revelation 21. We have to patch the prophecies from Isaiah into that chronology.

It seems best to me, as I look at and try to interpret it, that verses 17 through 19 of Isaiah 65

takes place after verse 25. That section between verses 20 and 25 refers to the Millennium—most particularly to the Great White Throne Judgment—and then comes verses 17 through 19: "Behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth." Verses 17 through 19 describe our subject today.

One interesting theme in these three verses is that of gladness and joy. God says, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind," and then He talks about joy for the rest of the passage. Joys forever!

In comparison, Revelation 21 is mostly in the negative. In Isaiah 65: 19, it is, "The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying," and in Revelation 21, you have, "There are no more tears; there is no more death; there is no sorrow; there is no crying; there is no more pain."

However we put it, whether positive or negative, the idea that comes through from this passage is a superlative. We cannot imagine the absence of these things: sorrow, crying, pain, tears, and death. We cannot imagine that. Nor can we imagine the fullness of joy and the rejoicing during that time.

Whether you want to put it in the positive, we cannot understand it; whether you want to put it in the negative, we cannot understand that, either. We just have no experience whatsoever with a world, with a time, with an environment in which we are so joyful and lack all these other things. We have never had a time when we have been full of joy and without these other things. We cannot even imagine no more death. We are mortal creatures. We might get a tiny idea of what it might be like to live forever, but really, our finite minds cannot stretch that far. We can think about a very long time, but a *long time* is really vague compared to *eternity*.

Being happy—how long does your happiness normally last? Ouch! Oh! That is kind of how it is. We are constantly reminded. We have our ups, and we have our downs. What is it going to be like to live forever—all the time being up with no downs—to the point that we are so up, so full of life, so joyous that we do not even remember sorrow or tears or crying or any other bad thing that leads to death? It is impossible right now. We cannot fathom this time.

No wonder God only puts a little bit in there for us to understand. He gives just a tidbit, a little nibble here and there so that we can think about it and try to imagine it and maybe try to get a few cells of our mind around it. That is just about it, because it is so great and wonderful.

Notice what He specifically says here, what He wants us to rejoice in, to have joy in. He says in verse 18 to be "glad and rejoice forever in what I create"—in what *He* creates. The emphasis is on *He*. He makes it possible for us to have real joy and gladness. As I said, if we try to create joy and gladness, it only lasts for a short time, and it is really not fullness of joy.

He will wipe away every tear. His acts of creation will usher in utopia, but not man's idea of it. Every time man has tried to create utopia in some form or fashion—most recently among communists—in what did it end? It ended in division, bloodshed, war, destruction, and, of course, tears, sorrow, desolation, and holocaust.

The new heavens and the new earth will be totally God's creation. He will have done pretty much all the work. He said, "Behold, I will make all things new" (Revelation 21). His will, finally,

will be done to His satisfaction, and that is when we will have fullness of joy.

This next passage inspired this sermon:

I Corinthians 15:22-28 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward, those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, [where I got my title] when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Paul truncates time quite a bit in verses 23 and 24. In fact, he skips over the entire Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment and goes straight to the end. He has Christ resurrected, and then we are resurrected—and then, suddenly, we are at the end. There is a whole 1000 years in there, but to us the time will be like a day, as it says in II Peter 3. He goes right to the heart of the matter; he skips right to when the Father takes up direct rulership of all things. Paul does pull back and say that Christ has to reign—and that takes in the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment, of course—but his idea as he moves toward verse 28 is this hand-over of power, when God the Father will take up the reins of government and rule forever.

Verse 24 is a switch-up of events. Paul puts delivering up the Kingdom to God the Father before He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. Really, you must put an end to all rule and authority and power first, before the Son delivers the Kingdom to God the Father.

The end, then, once we get these things straight, is the consummation, or the completion, of the work of redemption of humanity that Christ took up at the foundation of the world. He was slain from the foundation of the world. When man sinned, as God knew that man would do because man is mortal and flesh and Satan was out there—God was not fooled—God knew that there would need to be a Savior, and Jesus Christ volunteered for that. In essence, He was slain from that first sin. His job would not only be coming to earth and living a life of righteousness as our example, sacrificing and doing all those things that He did in terms of healing and casting out demons and showing us how to live, and then dying on the tree, but it also entails everything that happens after that.

Christ also has a part, of course, in our calling. God the Father chooses us and leads us to Christ. Christ is the head of the church, and it is our job to be united under Him as He works to bring us to salvation. Also, of course, He is going to be instrumental in our resurrection. After that, we are going to work with Him for a thousand years, and He will be training us then.

He is not done then, however, because His job does not end with us. Because He has billions of other people He is going to be bringing to that same salvation, He will be working at that during

those thousand years and the hundred years of the Great White Throne Judgment period. He has a huge job on His hands; and since He needs some help, He is going to have us help Him. That work has to be done, and He will be working hard at that through that whole time. His is not an easy job. He has to put down all rule, all authority, and all power—and not just in the Millennium.

Can you imagine all the people, all the enemies who are going to come up in the Great White Throne Judgment period and all their ideas from all these different time periods of human history? Say, for example, this particular group of people totally annihilated this other group of people. They are going to come up in the resurrection together and say, "Did not I kill you the other time?" They are going to go at each other again! He is going to have put down all that power and authority that they think they have and bring them peace and bring them to salvation. We are going to have a hand in that. That is what has to be done before He can hand over the Kingdom to the Father.

There is a lot of work to do, but it will be done; we have that right here in God's word. As a matter of fact, it is all going to get done. He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed will be death—and that, too, will be destroyed.

When He puts everything under His feet—job finished!—He is done. He has done His job. He has done the job assigned to Him that He took up with relish and great love for His creation. He did it! I am sure He will say, "I am sorry we lost a few," but most of those of humanity, I am certain, will be saved, because He is God. He will do His utmost to save them.

He will get to the point at which He will have finished the work: He will have brought humanity to salvation. Then, He will hand the world back to God. From this point on, the administration of the earth and the entire universe will be conducted as it had been before sin entered the world. Satan, the real creator of sin, will be put away forever, without possibility of parole. The tempter to sin will be permanently put out of commission. No more! Done.

At this point, every human will have had his opportunity for salvation and will have entered either the resurrection to eternal life or the resurrection to condemnation—the second death. Without sin, there is no more curse of death; the last enemy, then, will have been destroyed. All enemies, every enemy will have been destroyed or abolished. In time, it will not even be remembered—this time of enemies and sin and death and sorrow and crime. Everything, and everyone will be subject to Christ.

Then, with the world under His feet, He will voluntarily deliver His rulership and all that power back to God the Father; submitting Himself to the Father as He always had. At that time, as He said, God will be all in all. This is the end toward which all of human history has been pointing. All of God's plan has been pointing toward this time when God will be all in all—that is, God will be eternally supreme and sovereign in and over everything and everyone.

No wonder this is called the Last Great Day. As I said, it is superlative. There are not enough words even in the English language to describe it. It is a great day.

In this next section of scripture, you have to remember that the primary purpose is not prophecy but exhortation. He is exhorting these people to repent, and he is using this as a

motivation for them. However, we can see that it falls neatly and correctly into place with what we have read in Isaiah and I Corinthians and what we will read in a few moments in Revelation 21.

II Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

As this passage begins, Peter links this to the Day of the Lord. That is right, although it seems to throw a lot of people off. Which end of the Day of the Lord is it? It is not a wrong thought in the least to call this part of the Day of the Lord. You have to remember that a couple verses earlier, Peter wrote to these same people,

II Peter 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

What Peter has done is use the Day of the Lord as a general time period. The Day of the Lord includes the entire time of Christ's rulership from the day that He first picks it up until the day that He hands it over. That is His day, from the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment until the time that He has put all rule and power and authority under Him and He hands it over to His Father. The passing of the heavens and the earth is part of that one day, just at its end.

What Peter pictures here is a roaring, cataclysmic, fiery, white-hot scouring of the earth. If you want to have a mental picture of it, you may have seen on television a volcano glowing as it erupts; you see fire. Instead of the stream of molten rock, though, this event will cover the whole earth, or the whole earth will become molten. Peter pictures this ball of fire melting and dissolving what is on the earth. The earth heats up like a furnace, and he says that it gets so hot that it changes the very fundamental elements of which it is made. They dissolve and melt.

Everything that is on the earth at this time—whatever it is—is burned with that white-hot heat. All the wicked works that were done in it are completely consumed. Nothing is left, because it has been all purified by fire. Thus, he says that since these works are only going to be destroyed, should we not be living and working in a holy and godly manner? Only these things—these works of righteousness that become our character—shall survive such a thing.

It is thought by some that this fiery cataclysm is the lake of fire. This whole world and everything in it will be burned up. I can imagine a scenario in which all those who have

accepted salvation and proven themselves faithful to God will lift off the earth, and everything left will be burned, with weeping and gnashing of teeth, perhaps because those who will have rejected God will not have that power to leave the earth. It is interesting, however, to look at the timing here:

Revelation 20:12—21:1 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. And I saw a new heaven, and a new earth...

If you take out the chapter break, it seems to happen right away. Once everything is burned up—all the wicked works and all the wicked people—God makes a new heaven and a new earth. It is just a thought.

Peter, in his description of the Day of the Lord, echoes Paul and Isaiah in describing the new heavens and the new earth as being a place of pure righteousness and joy under God's rulership. What he gets to is the idea of being holy in conduct and godliness and looking forward to this new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells. It is an event or a time—a period—to look forward to with great hope and anticipation; and it should motivate us to change and grow so that we will witness and experience it ourselves, as Peter went on to say as he was closing his epistle. He exhorts us,

II Peter 3:18 Grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now, and forever. Amen.

This gives you the same flavor as I Corinthians 15, building up the idea of the glory of God and the power of God and the wonder of God, finally coming to, "And God will be all in all." Peter and Paul were of the same mind in all of this.

This next passage is again much of what we have already gone over elsewhere.

Revelation 21:1-5 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God [God will be all in all]. And God [remember, we will rejoice in what He creates] will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no

more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

John does add a few more details. Maybe his vision was different from what Isaiah saw, but these few new details add a bit more to our understanding.

First of all, there is no more sea. It evaporated in the burning of the earth.

New Jerusalem comes down from heaven. That was in there in Isaiah, making Jerusalem a joy; but this is New Jerusalem, and he describes it in terms of being a bride. This is God's residence on the earth, and she is decked out in all her graceful beauty and glory. It is God's abode. It has to be the most magnificent structure ever because it will house the Great King for all eternity. It has to be absolutely spectacular.

As I said, this is a day of superlatives. You just cannot come up with a description good enough to describe all this. Normally, one of the good things that we have in our culture is the beauty of a bride on her wedding day—the pleasure, the serenity, the joy of a bride as she comes down the aisle to meet her husband. That is the imagery that John uses for New Jerusalem.

Then, we are told God Himself—the Father, not the Son—comes to dwell with men. Actually, that is a wrong way to put it. He comes and dwells with those who were once human but are now glorified God-beings, members of His Family. He will be everyone's God and King. If that is the case, how could there be any of these bad things? Everybody is in agreement. Everybody is unified. Everyone wants the best for everyone else. There is no more crying, no more sorrow, no more tears, no more pain, no more death. Everyone is finally in unity.

The overall theme of this passage is "new." As I mentioned in Isaiah 65, it is not just the old converted or refurbished, polished up and put out for more use. This is a time of all new—brand new—of a new creation and a new city—a new perfect, glorious, joyous, way of life. There will be, basically, no connection to the old. All of that is past away.

You will not even remember it. It will be like a bad dream or a bad experience—a time when we went through these things like sorrow and pain and crying and death. You will not want to remember it, because the days we will be living in will be so wonderful and great, why think about the bad old days? We are going to have the golden age of God forever. There will be no end to it. We will always be with God and He with us. Why even think about it? All things will be made new.

Interestingly, He says to John, who is drooling with his jaw open down to his chest, "Write! Quit looking around, and write! You have got a job to do! Write! These things are true and faithful! It is really going to happen, John! This is not a fantasy! This is not some hair-brained utopia! This is really coming! Write! Let my people know that it is coming and that it is so glorious! Write, because these words are true and faithful!"

Who said that? He who sat on the throne said it. When He speaks and when the words leave His mouth, they do not come back to Him empty. When God speaks, His word is accomplished. This

is sure to happen. "Write, for these words are true and faithful," and the God who is behind them is true and faithful.

Revelation 21:22-27 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Only those who passed muster will be there.

This passage has another idea—actually, a few, but they are all very similar. I will not go into them in any great detail, but I want to bring out the idea. What is being spoken about here is direct access to God. "I saw no temple in it because Lord God Almighty—the High God—the Father—and the Lamb are its temple." They will no longer be screened away from humanity. Access will not be out there by the altar two thousand cubits away. It says that the gate is never shut; it is always wide open. A light streams forth from both of them, the Father and the Son, and we will always be in it.

Then there is this honor and glory business. The whole period will be a time of great glory. As Bill Onisick said, those who are kings will bring their honor and glory into it. However, there is not going to be any kind of honor and glory that can compare to that of the Father and His Son. Any other kind of glory will be diminished by Their glory. There will be nothing in it to taint that glory in the least. It is unimaginable.

Revelation 22:1-6 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing [health] of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Then he said to me, "