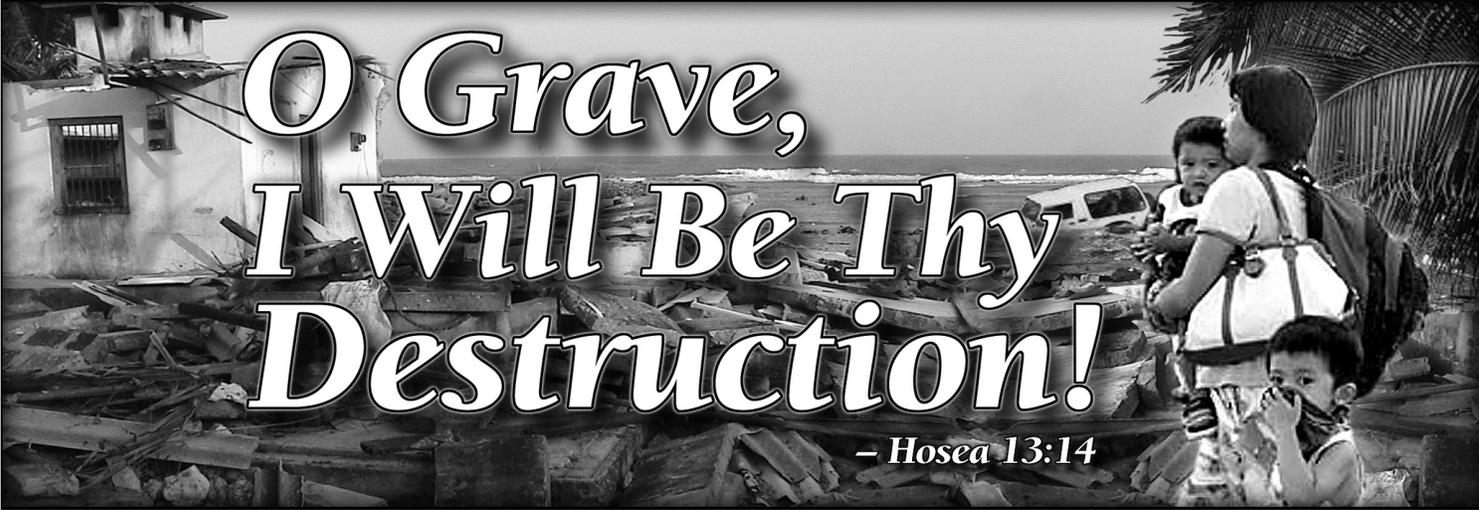


THE END TIMES

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O Grave, I Will Be Thy Destruction!

— Hosea 13:14

“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth...” — John 5:28, 29

Humanity is sickened by one horrific headline after another: ***“Tsunami hits unsuspecting thousands...”*** An estimated 155,000 men, women and children have been declared dead as a result of the single most powerful earthquake in over 40 years. Millions have been injured and displaced, and the entire world has been affected by this catastrophic event. Most of us can hardly take in the scope of such devastation, and yet, on a personal level, we can sympathize with the horrible sting of death and the painful grip of tragedy. We all long for the end of sorrow.

AN ACT OF GOD?

Regrettably, many call natural disasters such as this *“acts of God.”* But are they? If God is the author of such horrific tragedy, then why did Jeremiah state that God’s eyes *“run down with tears night and day”* when He sees His creation suffering? (Jeremiah 14:17) And, why did the Apostle John state that *“God is love,”* and that He has promised a time when He will wipe away all tears, sorrow and death? (1 John 4:16; Revelation 21:4) These tragedies are certainly not *“acts of God,”* but acts of nature in the earth’s last, unfinished creative epoch—the seventh *“day.”*

The Bible foretells of an everlasting Kingdom to come where death and destruction will be no more. There, mankind will exist in a perfect *Garden of Eden* condition worldwide, such as Adam experienced before Satan’s deception led him into disobedience. When Satan intervened in the Garden and led Adam into sin, the result was the beginning of sorrow—not only to mankind, but also to the earth. *“Cursed is the ground for thy sake.”* (Genesis 3:17) Our first parents were cast out of paradise into the unfinished earth, where the components of nature were still unstable. Continuing to labor under the Adamic curse, mankind has been subjected to sporadic upheavals of nature, as

yet, unbalanced. Yes, Satan, filled with pride and rebellion, has been the real cause of the last 6,000 years of sickness, tragedy and death. And now, he is fighting to keep control as the evil *“god of this world.”* 2 Corinthians 4:4

Despite the extreme suffering mankind has experienced generation upon generation, something constructive will come from it. God realizes the enormity of human suffering, and, from a time *“before the foundation of the world,”* He has planned for the resurrection of all who have ever lived—an opportunity for all to gain everlasting life. (1 Peter 1:19, 20) Yes, because *“God is love,”* He intends to turn these cursed conditions into an opportunity to teach mankind the extreme consequence of sin and rebellion. Experience with Satan’s evil world will teach mankind the everlasting lesson of trust, loyalty and obedience to our all-wise Creator. *“It is a difficult exercise which God has imposed upon the sons of Adam to develop themselves by it.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:13—Fenton Translation) Note that God does not cause the evil, but has permitted it for a period of time.

ALL SHALL ESCAPE FROM DEATH

Yes, because God cares, He did not abandon the world of mankind in a hopeless condition. He did not allow death to be the FINAL condition of innocent, suffering millions. He has provided a *“ransom”*—the basis of the only true hope for a world in despair. *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction.”* (Hosea 13:14) The Apostle Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55: *“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”*

The curse of death that Adam brought upon all is offset by the price paid for all by Christ in laying down his life for

mankind. (1 Timothy 2:3-6) This wonderful provision gives a fresh opportunity to all who have ever lived to be out from under that Adamic curse. *“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”* 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22

This “ransom” will provide for the return of all the dead to life, the joyful reunion of loved ones, the opportunity to learn of the one true God, and to live forever in health and happiness upon a perfect earth. This we read in John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* The “ransom” promises a resurrection to all—first to Christians who “believe” now, and later to “all the families of the earth” who will be given an opportunity to “believe in him” under more favorable circumstances in God’s Kingdom.

LAZARUS, COME FORTH!

At his first advent, Jesus performed many miracles which foreshadowed the great work which he, with his glorified Church, will accomplish for the world during his Messianic thousand-year kingdom. The most notable miracle was the awakening of his friend Lazarus from the dead. (John 11) When Lazarus became gravely ill, his sisters, Martha and Mary, knowing of Jesus’ power to heal, called for Jesus. But, Jesus did not come right away. Instead, he permitted Lazarus to suffer death. Knowing that Lazarus did die, Jesus said to his disciples, *“Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.”* Then, so that they understood, he added, *“Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there.”* Why would he be glad that his friend had fallen asleep in death? Because now it would provide him an opportunity to demonstrate to all who would be his disciples the great power of God vested in him respecting the resurrection of the dead.

Later, when Jesus arrived at Lazarus’ tomb, he found Mary and Martha saddened that he had not intervened to prevent Lazarus’ death. Martha said in her anguish, *“Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.”* Jesus answered, *“Thy brother shall rise again,”* and Martha responded in return, *“I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”* She knew that her brother was not in heaven, but “asleep” in the grave, and that there he would wait until being resurrected in the “last day”—the thousand-year Messianic Kingdom. Martha then told her Lord that it was too late for Lazarus to be healed—that he had already been dead four days

and his body had begun to decay. But, to demonstrate the promise of the resurrection, Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus, had the stone that sealed it rolled away, and, after praying to his Heavenly Father, *“He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth! And he that was dead came forth.”* We can only imagine what a great joy it must have been for Martha and Mary to have their beloved brother back from the grave!

Of course, Lazarus eventually returned to the grave. His awakening from the tomb was merely a temporary matter—a miraculous foretaste of the coming power and blessed work of Messiah during his Messianic reign. *“These things did Jesus and manifested forth his glory.”*

GOD’S COMPASSIONS FAIL NOT!

What Jesus did for Lazarus during his first advent he will ultimately do for everyone who has ever died. *“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”* (John 5:28, 29 NAS) This passage denotes two classes who will come forth from the grave. The first are those who have proven faithful to trials, disciplines and testings during this present evil world and have passed these successfully and are worthy of perfect life. These are but a “little flock” of Christian faithful. The second class are the remainder of mankind who have not accepted salvation through Christ as yet because of various unfavorable circumstances in their lives in this present evil world. Those who died in the terrible

tsunami—and countless other disasters throughout man’s history—will have the privilege of learning of the only name whereby they might be saved. (Acts 4:12) These are called forth from the grave to experience a time of judgment to determine whether they will learn righteousness or reject it. Thank God that all those we saw time and again on the news being swept up by the tsunami will receive life again from our God, *“because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning...”* Lamentations 3:22-23

WAITING FOR THE DAWNING OF A BRIGHTER DAY

If mankind is to be blessed, why is God waiting so long to pour out His blessing? Why does He not prevent the sickness, tragedy and death that plague this planet? Just as Mary and Martha were distressed that the Lord had not come sooner to prevent their own loss, so, too, the world is distressed that God is not putting an end to

The Lord, through the Prophet Jeremiah sends a message of consolation for every grieving heart:

“A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for... they shall come again from the land of the enemy [death].”



Jeremiah 31:15-17

all of the sorrow they see now. The Scriptures assure us that *“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”* Psalm 30:5

Yes, God has a loving reason for everything He plans and purposes to do. At this time, He is teaching the exceeding sorrows of a world left on its own and under the present ruler of darkness, Satan. When God finally says, *“It is enough!”* we can rest assured that there will be great changes in the earth, and all will begin to see that the permission of evil was both educational and preparatory to the ushering of mankind into the ages of blessing to come, wherein *“all the families of the earth will be blessed.”* (Genesis 28:14) Each will have a full, fair opportunity at that time to gain the knowledge that they need to grow to perfection and to attain everlasting life through their great redeemer and life-giver. (Isaiah 26:9) In the not far distant future, all those who perished in the tragedy of today will be reunited with their loved ones. Though God’s plans are misunderstood now, in due time, His merciful character and government will be vindicated. (Luke 21:21-32) The Apostle John describes this time in Revelation 21:4, *“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”*

THE PROGRESSIVE STAGES OF GOD’S KINGDOM

A common misunderstanding of Scripture is that when one dies, they immediately go to heaven. But, as shown in the illustration of Lazarus, the Scriptures clarify that all who die are waiting in the *“sleep of death”* for the resurrection *“in the last day.”* To illustrate, of all the faithful patriarchs, surely David would be in heaven, but, the Apostle Peter reasoned of *“the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.”* (Acts 2:29) Indeed, the Apostle Paul explains that they will come forth, *“every man in his own order.”* Christ was spoken of as the *“first fruits of them which slept.”* (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23) In other words, he was the first to be resurrected from the dead—not simply raised for a short time from the dead, as was Lazarus.

The Scriptures teach that the general resurrection processes will not begin until the second advent of Christ and will continue throughout a considerable portion of the Messianic Age—the thousand-year day of resurrection and restitution. At his second advent, Christ resurrects his faithful followers first. *“Blessed*

and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:6) This will be but a *“little flock”* including *“not many wise, not many great, not many learned, but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith, heirs of the Kingdom.”* (Luke 12:32; 1 Corinthians 1:26, 27; James 2:5) Only this *“little flock”* have been willing to submit to trials and disciplines in various ways, for the purpose of refining their characters as New Creatures. 2 Corinthians 5:17

Not long after this *“first resurrection”*—the glorification of the Church—will come the resurrection of the Ancient Worthies, the overcomers of Old Testament times prior to the Gospel Age. The assurance is that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the faithful and obedient prophets of old will come forth from their tombs to perfect human conditions. Psalms 45:16 states that they will be made *“...princes in all the earth.”* (See also Hebrews 11:40) They will be grand earthly reflections of the heavenly Creator, and, as such, they will be excellent instructors. But, whom will they instruct?

A MERCIFUL PLAN FOR ALL

The instruction of the world will proceed throughout the thousand-year Kingdom, and we are assured that *“the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea,”* and that *“they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest*

of them...” (Isaiah 11:9; Jeremiah 31:34) This will be a glorious time with grand opportunities for every man, woman and child to learn to know the Lord, to obey him, and to grow to mental, moral and physical perfection. This does not mean universal everlasting life regardless of obedience, for the Scriptures declare that such as refuse to profit by the glorious opportunities granted them, shall be destroyed from amongst the people in the second death—*“They shall be as though they had not been.”* (Obadiah 16; Acts 3:19-23) We believe that this will be rare, however, for the Scriptures indicate that the majority *“shall return [from their graves], and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads...”* (Isaiah 35:10) Thus will God’s loving plan bring all the willing and obedient into harmony with Him in a universe free from fear, oppression, pain and death.

The Desire of All Nations Shall Come

No more natural disasters: *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain...”* Isaiah 11:9

No more evil: *“No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast...”* *“And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie...”* Isaiah 35:9; Revelation 21:27

No more dying: *“Death where is thy sting, grave where is thy victory.”* *“...and there shall be no more death...”* 1 Corinthians. 15:55; Revelation 21:4

No more works of Satan: *“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”* 1 John 3:8

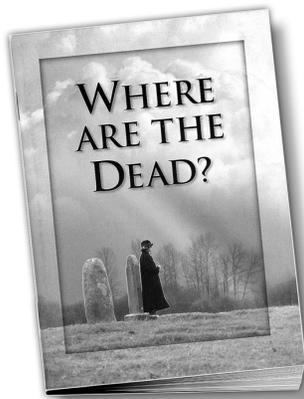
No more homelessness or starvation: *“They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat.”* Isaiah. 65:21-23

No more sickness: *“And no inhabitant will say I am sick.”* *“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing...”* Isaiah 33:24; Isaiah 35:5

No more wars: *“They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war anymore.”* Micah 4:3

No more sadness: *“...good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”* *“...they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”* Luke 2:10; Isaiah 35:10

No more fear: *“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fating together; and a little child shall lead them.”* Isaiah 11:6



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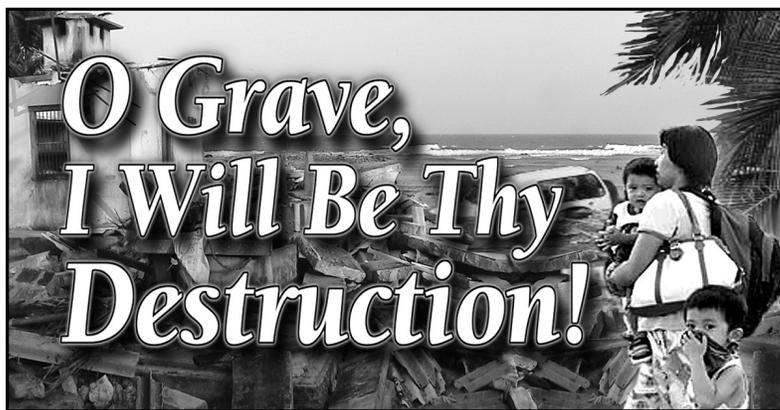
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