

THE PROMISE THAT IS THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

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"looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Webster's Dictionary defines hope as "confidence in a future event; the highest degree of well-founded expectation of good." Hope is a golden thread to be seen in all parts of the Bible; it is a diamond with brilliant facets and appears at least forty-eight times in the New Testament. The apostle Peter wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively (living) hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Peter believed hope was an important by-product of regeneration, a fountain of living water arising within the soul to overcome doubt and banish despair.

A Saving Hope... How Redemptive

"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom 8:24). A man does not hope for something already in his possession. Rejoicing in what he has, he anticipates more! Salvation, the forgiveness of sin and everlasting life are gifts of God's grace, but the hope of the church is to be saved from sin's presence. Whatever Christians have received, it is nothing compared with what God has in store for them. It is difficult for a true believer to be completely satisfied upon the earth. He looks for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

A Sure Hope... How Reliable

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (Heb. 6:19). The writer of this letter was careful to indicate that "strong consolation" was something acquired by those "who fled for refuge" to Christ. The same kind of word was used for those who went to the cities of refuge in Israel. A good anchor never drifted. Evidently, a man's faith in Christ should endure at all times.

A Splendid Hope... How Reassuring

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection

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of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Whatever hope the believer possessed prior to his regeneration, it increased greatly after his conversion to Christ. Peter mentioned "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). The apostle's words covered a wide span from bankruptcy to benevolence, from rags to riches, from unashamed wickedness to unlimited wealth. That hope thrilled the soul and provided the encouragement needed to live triumphantly.

A Special How Remarkable

"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thess. 2:16). God always gives lavishly; there are no strings to His offers and no time limit to deprive people of their possessions in Christ. Everlasting life is followed by everlasting consolation. Looking back leads to regret; to look ahead is to rejoice. A good hope is unquestionably encour-

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aging; it can never be false, and it cannot be denied.

A Sanctifying Hope... How Rewarding

"But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). As brides anticipate pleasing their bridegrooms, so Christians yearn for the Marriage of the Lamb. To love Christ is to desire to please Him. Purification is not automatic; it demands effort, and a deliberate renunciation.

A Soothing Hope... How Reviving

"That ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:13-14, 18). Paul believed saints who died were absent from the body, and present with the Lord (see 2 Cor. 5:8). He explained that believers will possess bodies "like unto Christ's glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). When the Savior returns, the mortal will put on immortality and glorified saints will live in new bodies forever. Paul believed that message was a cure for broken hearts!

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THE PROMISE OF A GREAT RESURRECTION

"For this we say unto you by the word of the lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the lord" (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

When the Lord instructed His disciples concerning the forthcoming ministry of the Holy Spirit, He said 'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13). Nevertheless, Christ did not promise this would be accomplished instantaneously. Sometimes, illumination and understanding come in a moment; at others, the learning process is developed gradually.

Luke, in describing the death of Stephen, said, "He fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). The beloved physician used the word *kaimaomai* which is found 18 times in the New Testament. It refers to slumber or taking of a rest in sleep. It is used in John 11:13 in reference to the death of Lazarus. The early Christians considered death to be falling into a deep sleep from which they would awaken in the Resurrection. Nevertheless, being asleep did not mean they were dead! Paul progressed in his understanding of truth.

Deep Sleep... Restricting

When David died, it was written, "So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings 2:10). Egyptians believed in another world; their kings and queens were buried with many articles thought to be needed on the journey to the hereafter. The Hebrews were different. They considered death to be a place of inactivity where the deceased slumbered with ancestors.

The idea of life beyond the tomb was undeveloped and even during the ministry of Jesus the Sadducees denied the possibility of

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a future existence, believing death meant separation, inactivity, and physical extinction. The Pharisees rejected their doctrine, teaching there was life after death.

The first man to believe in immortality was Job, whose faith shone brilliantly in the darkness of his surroundings (see Job 19:25).

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Departed Souls... Remembering

The teaching of Jesus was concise, clear, and convincing. He insisted death was a highway to another world. That physical bodies remained in the ground was undeniable, but Christ differentiated between the body and its human tenant. When he spoke of a certain rich man, He said, "The rich man also died, and was buried: And in hell (hades), he lifted up his eyes, being in torments" (Luke 16:22-23).

Questions which are difficult to answer arise from this Scripture. The rich man's body was buried in the ground, yet afterward he spoke of fingers and tongues, and it is difficult to envisage such members without their belonging to bodies! The man was in possession of his faculties as were Abraham and Lazarus. These men were not "sleeping with their fathers!" They were not in the immediate presence of God, but in an intermediary place called Paradise (see Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4). The Lord's message suggested the place of the departed had two areas; one for the unrighteous dead; the other for those who loved and served Lord.

Delivered Rejoicing

Peter said, "David is not yet ascended into the heavens" (see Acts 2:34), and that applied to all Old Testament believers. When the Savior removed sin, He opened a way into the presence of God, proclaimed deliverance to the captives, and led a multitude of believers to heaven (see Eph. 4:8). This glorious revelation enabled Paul to speak about being "absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). It was significant that when Christ spoke to the dying thief, He did not mention "sleeping with the fathers." The man's body was buried in a criminal's grave, but he went with Christ to "be present with the Lord."

Definite Statements... Reviewed

Teaching concerning "soul-sleep" is obsolete~hristians do not remain in their grave until the day of resurrection; they are present with Christ. Within God's realm bodies are not essential. Nevertheless, when Christ returns to earth accompanied by His saints, mortality will put on immortality. At the sound of the trump, "The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are

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alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:1~17). That will be the greatest event in the history of the human race.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee;
for Thy coming we wait;
The sky, not the grave is our goal.

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THE PROMISE OF A HEAVENLY PROCESSION

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and true. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns... And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean... And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:11-16).

The most sensational event in the history of mankind will take place when a glittering procession begins at the throne of God and ends on the mount of Olives. Modern technology enables men to walk on the moon, and even children take for granted things which were ridiculed by their grandparents. Nevertheless, there are strict limitations to the accomplishments of astronauts who depend upon life-support systems and rocket-propelled vehicles. The idea of elegant riders upon white horses descending through the clouds staggers the imagination. People are accustomed to watching stars falling through space, yet only prophets inspired by God could have described events destined to amaze angels and men. In all parts of the earth, either by natural eyesight or television, nations will see a glittering procession descending to earth and watch as the King of

Kings stands upon the Mount of Olives. What happens thereafter provides the most exciting reading in the Bible.

The Unchanged Christ... How Thrilling

When the Savior ascended from the Mount of Olives, angels

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announced He would "so come in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The words "this same Jesus" proclaimed His unchanging immortality. The same Christ who had traversed the roads of Palestine would return to repeat His actions. He would be the same Jesus, attractive, unspeakably wonderful, ageless, and accessible. The disciples had known Him upon the earth; they would recognize Him again in the city of David. When astronauts return from space they are protected from the danger of a fiery re-entry and the gravitational pull of earth. Christ will not require such ingenuity. As He ascended slowly but surely, into the sky, so will He return. He will not need protection to offset any danger. Every force in existence will be subject to His will.

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The Unchallenged Conquest... How Timely

As a contrast to the serenity of heaven, earth will be embroiled in the agony of a global war. The land of Israel will be filled with bloodshed as hostile nations try to annihilate the Jews. Two-thirds of the people will perish, but the returning Messiah will rescue one-third of His people (Zech. 13:89). When the Jews and their friends are threatened with disaster, God's atomic power will bring relief (Zech. 14:12), and a nation will be born in a day. God's victory will be unchallenged, for His enemies will be dead. Astonished, ashamed, but profoundly grateful, the surviving Israelis will fall at His feet. "Th that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one" (Zech. 14:9).

The Unsurpassed Coronation... How Tremendous

The nations of the world have become accustomed to the televised inauguration of United States presidents and the coronation of British monarchs. Such events will fade into insignificance when the Prince of Heaven is crowned King of Kings in Jerusalem. Daniel predicted, "And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days" (approximately three and a half years). Daniel proceeded to say, "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:11-13).

Jerusalem, which for centuries was "trodden down of the Gentiles," will become the center of earth's attention, the most glittering city in existence. The coronation of the Jewish Messiah will be almost beyond description. Even angels will rejoice when the ancient promise is fulfilled. "And, behold, thou... shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom, there shall be no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

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THE PROMISE OF JERUSALEM'S GREATEST DAY

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"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

There is an indescribable something about Jerusalem that makes it different from all other cities in the world. From the day when David captured the city of the Jebusites, the place has been the most important center in history. Jerusalem has been attacked many times and on seventeen different occasions totally destroyed. Yet it survived the onslaught of besieging armies, and on the ashes of the past new buildings were erected. Titus and his Roman legions attacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and the temple was completely demolished.

The city remained under Arab control for centuries, and it was not until the end of the famous six-day war in 1967 that Jews regained control of their capital. Limitations are still imposed on the Hebrew population; they are not permitted to demonstrate nor worship in the temple area. Arab policemen patrol and guard the Mosque of Omar. Many people believe peace will never be an actual fact in Jerusalem until the Messiah solves the problems which have troubled the Middle East for centuries. The Bible reveals that God in-

tends to make Jerusalem the greatest city in the world.

Many years ago God said to David, "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16). That message was repeated when Isaiah said, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:7). The greatest promise of all was given to Mary. God said, "And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever" (Luke 1:32-33). These promises have never been fulfilled; the most exciting events in time are yet to take place.

Mormons believe Christ will establish his kingdom in the United States of America, and to support their theory they refer to their own textbook which they believe to be inspired. This is common practice for exponents of non-Biblical doctrines—to rely on books thought to be more important than the Scriptures. Evidently they forget or ignore the warnings of God in Revelation 22:18-19.

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A Day of Israel's Distress... Problems Resolved

Throughout the centuries, Jews endured many trials. Their greatest difficulty arose from the failure to overcome spiritual blindness inherited from ancestors. Paul said, "For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart" (Acts 28:27). People who keep their eyes closed never see the light! That and other problems will be solved when Christ returns to the Mount of Olives. "In that day, shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem.... And one shall say unto him' What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zech. 12:11; 13:6).

A Day of Inspired Discovery... Pardon Received

During every major military crisis in World War II, the British government asked for a National Day of Prayer. Millions of people attended church services but never went again until the next crisis. When the nation of Israel kneels before the Messiah, Jerusalem will become a place of intense repentance and resolution. The veil which

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now blinds Jewish eyes will be removed, and the people will recognize "the stone which the builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner." "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). The City of David will be filled with cries of anguish, and the forgiveness of sins will be sought and obtained by every citizen.

A Day of Increasing Delight... Praise Resounding

"And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one" (Zech. 14:9). It is extremely difficult to comprehend all the wonderful things that will happen at the coronation of the Messiah. The glory of that occasion will supersede everything known in the history of mankind. "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (kL 35:10).

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THE PROMISE OF A CITY WITHOUT A TEMPLE

"And I saw no temple therein: for the lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:22-23; see also verses 24-27).

When the Jews functioned as a nation, they always had a temple. First, there was the tabernacle in the wilderness. That was replaced by Solomon's temple, and during the Lord's ministry upon earth a restored sanctuary was the center of Israel's activities. This was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. Throughout subsequent centuries, it only existed as a memory in the minds of dispersed people. Today, some of the Israeli politicians speak about the possibility of erecting a national shrine, but the cost of survival is too great to permit additional spending on a project considered by many to be unnecessary. It is thought-provoking that when the New Jerusalem descends from heaven, no temple will be within the city.

The Savior said to His disciples, "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 . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). Evidently the special place prepared by Christ for His followers is

the city that John saw descending from heaven. John described the city by highlighting its remarkable and novel "attractions."

The First Attraction... No Sanctuary

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (v. 22). The sanctuary was always the center of attraction. It was the place where the Lord resided. Within the Holy City God will be everywhere; to seek His presence will be unnecessary. There will never be organized services; worship and praise continue indefinitely.

The Second Attraction... No Sun

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (v. 23). John did not say there would never be sunshine; neither did he speak of the complete absence of the moon. He

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merely stated they would not be necessary. The city would be filled
with the Shekinah glory, the sacred luminosity which comes from

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the Lamb Himself. When Christ was upon earth He claimed to be
the Light of the World. That description was inadequate-He will
be the Light of every world!

The Third Attraction... No Separation

"And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall
be no night there" (v. 25). The entrances to Biblical cities were
always closed at night to provide security and defense against in-
truders. The only gates that remained open belonged to the cities of
refuge so that no one needing refuge was prevented from entering.
There will never be danger for anyone within or without God's
New Jerusalem

The Fourth Attraction... No Slumber

"There shall be no night there" (v. 25). When saints are immor-
tal, weariness will not exist. The redeemed will be like God Who
neither slumbers nor sleeps (see Ps. 121:4). This is one of the by-
products of eternal life. Human bodies require rest and refreshment;
even the Lord slept through a storm on the Sea of Galilee. There
will never be tiredness nor exhaustion in the New Jerusalem; the
Lamb will be the strength of His people.

The Fifth Attraction... No Sin

"And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth,
neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" (v. 27).
Sin will not exist, temptation will be unknown, and impurities of
every kind will be eternally banished. The city and its inhabitants
will be without blemish. There will be neither temple nor altar; the
only indication of sacrifice will be the wound prints in the hands
and side of the Lamb. The magnificent choir will sing, "Worthy is
the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5:9, 12).

The Sixth Attraction... No Strangers

"They which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (v. 27). The
people who are welcomed to the Holy City will be those who made
advance reservations! They did so while they had the time and
opportunity. It has been claimed that procrastination is the thief of
time. People who neglect making reservations for their eternal habi-
tations are foolish. Nothing can be as important as the salvation of a
person's soul!

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THE PROMISE THAT KEPT PETER'S EYES OPEN

"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens
and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

Throughout Jesus's ministry, the apostle Peter had a weakness.
He ceased looking at Christ and became concerned with people and
circumstances. When he walked on the water to go to Jesus, he saw
the boisterous waves and began to sink (see Matt 14:30). When the
apostle saw and heard the people at the fene, he began to curse (see
Mark 14:71). When he heard the risen Christ speaking on the beach
at the Sea of Galilee, he asked questions concerning John and was

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politely told to mind his own business! (see John 21:21-22). When Paul considered it necessary to rebuke his colleague, it was because Peter had compromised the great truths of his message (see Gal. 2:11-13). There were occasions when Simon gave too much attention to people and not enough to the Lord. He overcame that tendency with the help of a tremendous vision that transformed his outlook. He saw the end of time and gazed by faith upon new heavens and a new earth. That entrancing sight was enough to keep his eyes open!

The Greatness of God's Power... Unsurpassed

Peter spoke of "The Day of the Lord" which would come as a thief in the night-unexpectedly, silently, and without warning. He wrote, "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up... the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat" (2 Peter 3:10, 12). This prediction is worthy of attention, because experiments with nuclear fission are causing concern among scientists (see the author's book, What in the World will Happen Next?, p. 170, Kiegel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI). Sir James Jeans, the famous astronomer, said, "There are more worlds in space than there are grains of sand on all the beaches of earth," but scientists now believe he understated the facts. The universe is so large its immensity has become incomprehensible. Yet Peter believed God who will permit the lower heavens to burn but will be able to extinguish the conflagration. All parts of the outer world will remain intact and undamaged; only the lower heavens are to be destroyed. It should be remembered that when Lucifer rebelled against the Almighty, he was expelled from God's immediate presence into

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the lower heavens which became the headquarters of his evil administration. Those heavens, therefore, became defiled, and it will be necessary for Him to cleanse them before the world can be filled with righteousness.

The Greatness of God's Purpose... Untque

"Nevertheless we, according to his promise look for new heavens and a new earth." Theological interpretation is divided regarding the meaning of the apostle's statement. Some teachers believe that since everything, in one way or another, is indestructible, the fire will only cleanse the heavens and earth. Other theologians believe both heavens and earth will be replaced with new creations. The statement "being dissolved" suggests total destruction or at least the disappearance of that which is dissolved. This interpretation seems to be in harmony with the words of Isaiah. "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17). Astronomers believe that our sun belongs to a galaxy of more than a billion stars, and it is claimed there are more than one hundred billion galaxies in the universe. It is also taught that in these additional areas, there may be billions of planets similar to the earth. Since God made these worlds with a single sentence, He should have no difficulty performing the miracle described by Peter.

The Greatness of God's Pleasre... Unending

"A new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." God's desire has never changed! When He created Adam and Eve, He commanded them to "replenish the earth." He envisaged a world of blessedness, a place without suffering, pain and death. He never

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planned hospitals, prisons, poverty and broken hearts. These have been the products of unrighteousness. Throughout the ages the Lord planned to do in the end times what might have been done at the beginning: to create a world filled with righteousness and happiness. There may never be another evangelistic sermon, for congregations will be filled with eternal praise. Peter saw these things; the sight so filled him with delight, he may have lost his desire to sleep!

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THE PROMISE OF A DAY OF JUDGMENT

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:11-12).

The promise that there will be a day of judgment received a mixed reception from innumerable people. Some, unashamedly, ridiculed it; others ignored, denied, or sought to change its message. Fools disregard it; arrogance ignores it, sinners defy it, but wise people consider it. If there be no such day, men lose nothing except their lives. If the Bible is correct, they could lose their souls. Jesus asked, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (see Matt. 16:26). If it is impossible for a man to lose his soul, Christ wasted His time speaking about sin. Every person has two appointments which cannot be canceled. The first is with death, the second with God.

The Final Call... How inescapable

"And there was found no place for them." John saw a great white throne upon which sat the Judge of all the earth. The apostle had already written, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). That the earth and the heavens fled from His presence suggested His countenance was solemn and frightening. "His eyes were as a flame of fire" (Rev. 19:12). Even the greatest of earth's citizens fled, but no hiding place could be found—escape was impossible.

G. Franklin Allen tells that after World War II a membership roll was discovered in Germany with the names of eight million people who belonged to the Nazi party. To have one's name written in the authentic files had been a source of satisfaction, but when the war ended, everything changed. The Nazis fled in all directions, but for many there were no hiding places. They were extradited from other countries, taken back to Nuremberg, and sentenced for their crimes. That might be an illustration of the end of time; no one will be able to escape from the far-reaching arm of divine law.

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The Factual Consideration... How Irrefutable

"And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." Perhaps John referred to

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"books" because he had no knowledge of computers! The world has grown accustomed to machines that are capable of carrying the records of all people. Are there computers in heaven? God knew about them even from the beginning, and it may be beyond comprehension what angels can do in compiling the records of sinners who reject the overtures of the Almighty. The Savior spoke about a man who was speechless when asked by a king to explain his unpardonable behavior (see Matt. 22:12). Christ then described how the sinner was expelled from the king's presence and there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth." The implications of that story were easily recognized; they related to the time when guilty people will be required to explain why they refused to accept God's wedding garment of salvation.

The Fatal Condemnation... How Irreversible

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). There is no court of appeal in eternity. Here on earth retribution may be delayed for years because there are courts which consider appeals for clemency. When God pronounces sentence upon sinners, they are condemned forever; their guilt is established beyond doubt. Some theologians believe eternal doom means annihilation, that the punishment is eternal in effect only. Others teach sinners will be eternally separated from God, heaven, hope, and everything desirable. Whatever the final interpretation may be, the price is too high to be paid for the pleasures of this world. God offers pardon for every sin, a permanent home in heaven, and the assurance of eternal life. The Savior said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). A dying Christian astronomer said, "There is no need to fear the night if you live with the stars."

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THE PROMISE OF THE FINAL TRIUMPH

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death... And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all and in all" (1 Cor. 1:24-21).

The revelation of truth given to Paul enabled the apostle to see the end from the beginning. During his long and exacting ministry he endured many trials, but he never wavered in his faith of what would happen at the end of time. He knew Satan and sin would win occasional battles, but the final victory belonged to God. Nations would arise and exercise frightening power, but ultimately they would cease to exist. The authority of God would be challenged, but righteousness would not only survive, it would continue eternally. The letter to the Corinthian church explained what Paul believed, and that document remains one of the most cherished pieces of literature.

The Greatest Enemy... Annihilated

Throughout the ages, death continued to be man's greatest foe.

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Diseases thought to be incurable were overcome, and innumerable lives prolonged. Leprosy, polio, tuberculosis and other scourges were checked by scientific research, but death was only delayed. From the time when Adam and Eve looked at their murdered son (see Gen. 4:8) to the present time when cemeteries can be found in every nation, death has been a tyrant, destroying happiness and mining lives. Innocent children, famous scientists, royalty and peasants became victims. When Christ challenged and overcame the power of death, many people refused to believe the impossible had happened. Writing to his friends in Corinth, Paul insisted, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). The apostle explained how the resurrection of the Savior was only a part of the purpose of God. Christ was "the firstfruits" (see 1 Cor. 15:23) of a great harvest. Ultimately, death would not even exist; it would die! Throughout future ages there would never be need for hospitals, doctors, funeral parlors, nor cemeteries! Death which had cast shadows over the first world would never again threaten the happiness of God's people.

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The Greatest Act... Abdication

"For he (Christ) must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet... then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him." Paul did not suggest that the Lord would disappear from the eternal scene. Voluntarily, the Son had accepted an assignment given by the Father, but when His redemptive responsibilities had been fulfilled, He was free to accept the accolade of heaven. Thereafter, His greatest desire would be to spend eternity with His bride. As the Father had watched the Son completing His mission, so, throughout eternity, the Lord would watch and appreciate His church, the Lamb would continue to reside in the city which the apostle saw descending from heaven (see Rev. 1:10, 21:2-3). Describing that city, John said the streets were paved with gold! Was he suggesting that earth's most valuable commodity would become so commonplace that heaven's citizens would walk on it?

The Greatest Goal... Achieved

"That God may be all and in all." Man's mind is too undeveloped to comprehend the unfathomable depths of Paul's statement. Redeemed souls are not destined to become dummies or robots. Decisions will be made, actions planned, and successes won, but throughout eternity God will be present with His people. Every provision made by the Almighty will fill His people with amazement. God has never revealed everything to happen in the hereafter, but evidently there will be new occupations. If this were not so, gravediggers and funeral directors would be unemployed forever! There will never be armament factories nor steel mills producing the paraphernalia of war. Isaiah's words will be literally fulfilled, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9). "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and the spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). God will indeed be "All and in all."

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THE PROMISE OF SEEING CHRIST'S FACE

"And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4).

When I was a young Christian I listened to a strange old man whose prayer seemed quaint and yet wonderful. He said, "O God, I thank thee I never had wings! If I had, I would be up there tormenting Thee day and night and would probably be sent down here again." I was intrigued by his expressions, but the people in the prayer meeting knew exactly what Henry Richards meant. He believed heaven was so wonderful that had he possessed the ability to fly, he would have gone there immediately. That man was approaching ninety years of age, but his prayer was unforgettable. The saints in heaven will walk on streets of gold, explore the Holy City, meet many people, sing the praises of the Lamb, and see wound-prints in the hands and side of the Savior. Yet, to see the face of Jesus will provide the greatest of all thrills.

A Dangerous Vision ... Exodus 33:20

When the redeemed see their Lord, it will be the superlative climax to their earthly pilgrimage. To appreciate its magnitude, it is necessary to consider certain Scriptures. When Moses communed

with the Lord in Mount Sinai, the Lord said, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live." God was not implying that He desired to live in everlasting obscurity, nor suggesting that humans would never be permitted to draw near to their Maker. Israel had not witnessed a complete manifestation of God's glory, and the outshining of eternal holiness might have been fatal to sinful people. Moses was placed in "the cleft in the rock" to see God's "back parts" (see Ex. 33:21-23). Had man tried to do what was forbidden, ensuing judgment would have been disastrous.

A Definite 2 Corinthians 4:6

Against the background of Sinai's prohibition, the words of Jesus shine as a brilliant star. Christ said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). The Lord indicated the closed door was beginning to open! If people were pure in heart, someday they would see the Almighty. Yet, even God knew complete purity of heart was not within reach of sinners. Therefore, the Savior said to Philip, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how

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sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:9). If it were not possible for sinners to see God, at least they knew what He was like! In reply to the question, "What is God like?", the answer was contained in one word—Jesus.

A Desperate Venture... Revelation 6:15-16

When John described the events to precede the day of judgment, he used impressive words, "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." It should never be forgotten that God hates sin as much as He loves sinners! Redemption provided means whereby

THE PROMISE THAT IS THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

guilty people could approach the throne of grace. If the way-the Savior-were rejected and ignonId, the wrath suggested on Mount Sinai would become operative, and guilty people would perish.

A Delightful Victory... Revelation 22:4

The only attractive detail about the Cross was its shape! It was, so to speak, God's signpost. A part pointed toward heaven; the lower end reached to earth, and the two arms indicated different directions. The unrepentant sinner followed the road which led to tragedy, the other thief the way by which men could find forgiveness and peace. The distance between the two extremes was measureless. At the end of one road men fear the wrath of the Lamb, and endeavor to flee from His presence. At the other terminal, redeemed souls gaze in wonder at the face of the Redeemer and prepare to sing His praise throughout eternity. People must decide which direction they desire to take. Their decision in time will be final in eternity. It will be impossible to change directions after death has closed the door of opportunity.

Someday my earthly house will fall,
I cannot tell how soon 'twill be;
But this I know-my All in All,
Has now a place in heav'n for me.
And I shall see Him face to face
And tell the story-Saved by grace.

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