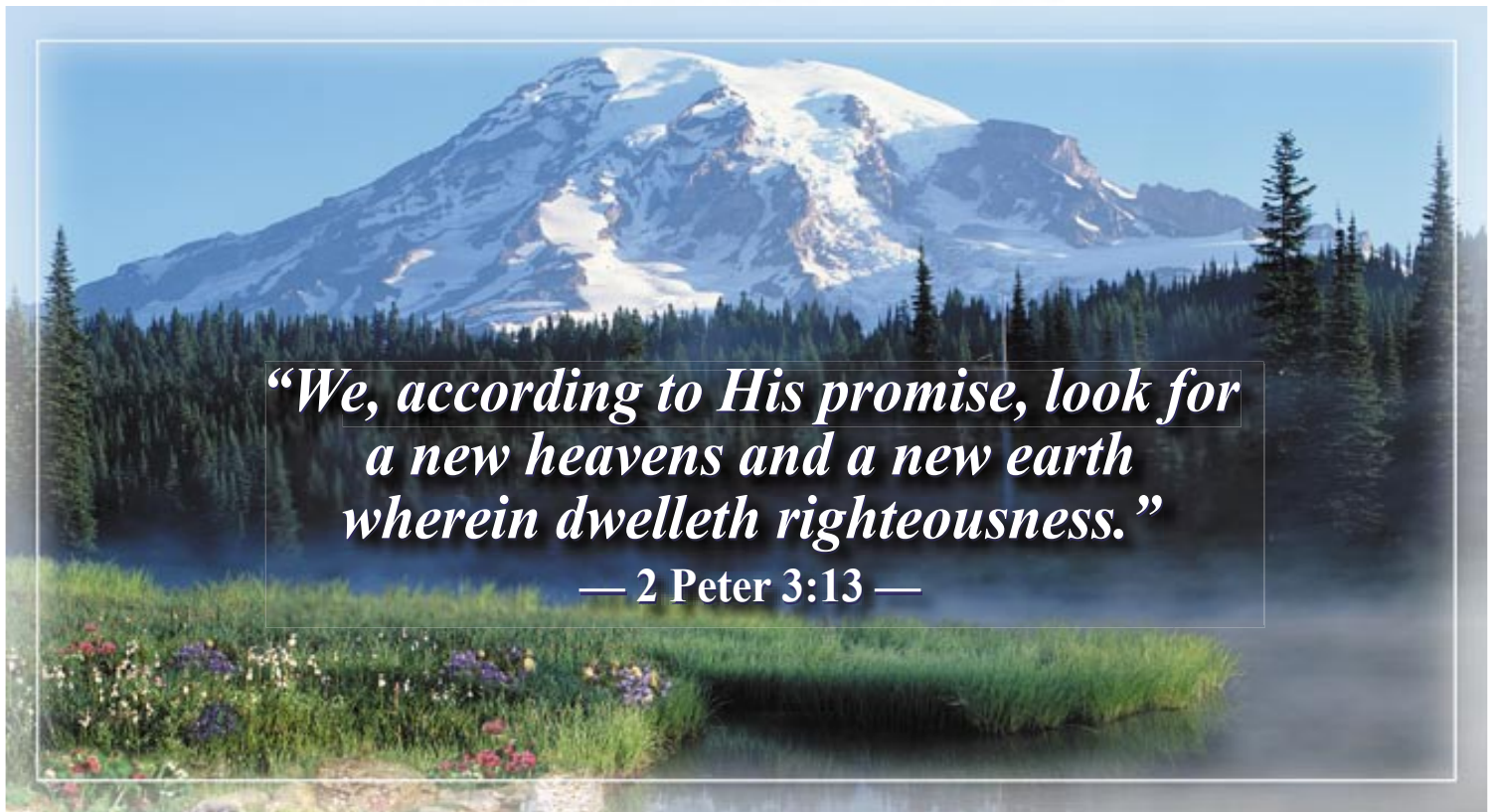


## “THE END OF THE WORLD” — AS WE KNOW IT —



In this time of great prophetic expectation, the expression *end of the world* is frequently used by Christians, and has been associated with the complete destruction of the planet. However, this gloomy prospect is the result of a misleading Bible translation which should more accurately read *end of the age* and not *end of the world*. (See Matthew 24:3, Rotherham: *the conclusion of the age*) This thought harmonizes with the Apostle Peter’s historic review of Noah’s day when he explained that “*the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.*” (2 Peter 3:6) Obviously it was not the literal world which came to an end—merely a ceasing of that order or condition of things which prevailed in the world prior to the time of the flood. Yes, ages may end and be succeeded by other ages, but the Bible declares that “*the earth abideth forever.*” Ecclesiastes 1:4

In determining a harmony between two seeming conflicting thoughts, i.e., *the earth abides forever* and *the end of the world*, Christians must give studious attention to the Scriptures

in the light of reason. There are several very important Bible study methods necessary to understand the meaning of phrases such as *end of the world*—important, because Bible students should handle the Word of God responsibly and not give wrong impressions of God’s plans and purposes. Understanding the plan of God for the earth and its inhabitants will illustrate to others the generous and loving character of our great Creator.

### HARMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES DISCOVERED THROUGH STUDY METHODS

#### TOPICAL BIBLE STUDY

To determine whether an interpretation of scripture is correct, it must first harmonize with all the other scriptures on the subject. This method of Bible study is termed *topical Bible study*. As an illustration, to study the subject of the *earth* in prophecy topically, one should go to a Bible concordance and look up the word *earth*. There, many scriptures will be listed from both the Old and New Testaments.

It is helpful to itemize the scriptures listed in the concordance, and, using another study method, to categorize according to the *context of the reference*. The following chart illustrates these two study methods used in tandem.

### TOPIC AND CONTEXT

#### Earth Destroyed:

Revelation 21:1; Matthew 24:35  
*Heaven & earth shall pass away*  
 Hebrews 1:10-12  
*Heaven & earth shall perish*  
 Zephaniah 3:8 *Earth devoured with fire*  
 2 Peter 3:5, 6 *World that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*  
 2 Peter 3:10 *Earth shall burn*

#### Earth Remains:

Matthew 6:10 *Thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven*  
 Ecclesiastes 1:4 *The earth abides forever*  
 Matthew 5:5 *The meek inherits earth*  
 Isaiah 45:18 *God created earth not in vain, formed it to be inhabited*  
 Psalm 104:5 *Foundations of earth shall not be removed forever*

#### New Earth:

Revelation 21:1 *New earth replaces old*  
 Revelation 21:5 *Christ will make all things new*  
 Isaiah 65:17 *Creation of a new heaven and a new earth*  
 2 Peter 3:13 *Look for a new heaven and a new earth*  
 Isaiah 66:22 *New earth remains forever*

Having listed many of the references concerning the future of planet earth, three other study methods are now necessary to aid in understanding—*definition, symbolism and time frame*.

### DEFINITION AND SYMBOLISM

As we have seen in the opening paragraph, a simple review of *definitions* by consulting a Bible concordance will assist the Bible student in understanding the original intent of the phrase. In our example, that which was to *end* was the *age* and not the *world*.

Looking into the *context* of a *topic* will help to determine whether one should interpret a word as *literal* or *symbolic*. Take the words in Zephaniah 3:8, 9 for example: “...*all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy*.” If taken literally, one could view God as a fire breathing dragon, which we know He is not. But, taken in *symbolic* language, jealousy is often pictured as a fire burning in the heart. Here, God’s jealousy is also shown as a fire, however, His jealousy is based upon fair and impartial judgment, toward a perfect end and for the benefit of all.

Reasoning on the *context* of this scripture, we can also see that God does not *literally* burn up the earth, nor the inhabitants, for He states in verse 9 that, after His anger burns, He will *turn to the people a pure language that they may all serve Him with one consent*. If the earth were destroyed, where would the people be residing to learn this new language?

Now review the *context* of Revelation 21:1 in the chart above, which uses highly *symbolic* language to describe the reign of Christ. There, Christ is illustrated as a husband and Lamb, and the Church is illustrated as his bride. Together they are illustrated as a tabernacle. All of these words are beautiful word pictures of a new world government under the reign of Christ and the Church, and, thus, the old earth and heavens must likewise be pictures of the old world government under the reign of Satan and his followers. Thus, it is Satan and his works—the systems of evil and error that he has set up—which shall be destroyed forever. See Revelation Chapter 20.

As a further confirmation of fire understood as a *symbol* by *context*, review 2 Peter 3:10 which reads: “*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which 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*.” Again, if taken literally, these words contradict that “*the earth abideth forever*.” A literal

interpretation would also present a significant problem if the literal heavens, where Christ, his Church and the angels abide, *pass away and melt with fervent heat*. God urges us: “*Come now, and let us reason together*.” (Isaiah 1:18) His holy Word must harmonize with itself, and the *symbolic* interpretation of this scripture harmonizes completely with the earth abiding forever. The *symbolism* of fire, here again represents the destruction of the elements of the old earthly systems under the reign of Satan and his minions: the present ecclesiastical *heavens* and political-social systems of earth.

Reasoning on the *context* of 2 Peter 3:6 (see chart above) we find that the earth *perished* during Noah’s day, and yet, the earth is still abiding today. Carrying this logic through, we conclude that, although the present order of society will be destroyed, Peter is assuring us of a new heavens and earth: “*we, according to His promise, look for a new heavens [new government ruled by Christ] and a new earth [social arrangement] wherein dwelleth righteousness*.” 2 Peter 3:6, 7, 13

### TIME FRAME

One final method of Bible study used to unlock many of its mysteries is *time frame*. We learn that the plan of God, with reference to man, spans three great periods of time, beginning with man’s creation and reaching into the illimitable future. Peter and Paul designate these periods *three worlds*. As will be observed in the following diagram, these three worlds are, as *Strong’s Concordance* terms it, *ages or periods of time*. They also represent three distinct manifestations of God’s divine providence on behalf of mankind.



The first *time frame* (or *dispensation*), from creation to the flood, was under the administration of angels, and is called by Peter “*The world that was*.” 2 Pet. 3:6, Hebrews 2:5

The second great *age* or *time frame*, from the flood to the establishment of the kingdom of God, is under the limited

control of Satan, “*the prince of this world,*” and is therefore called “*this present evil world.*” Gal. 1:4; 2 Pet. 3:7

The third *epoch* or *time frame* is to be a “*world without end*” (Isaiah 45:17) under divine administration—the kingdom of God—and is called “*The world to come... wherein dwelleth righteousness.*” Hebrews 2:5; 2 Peter 3:13

The first of these periods, or *worlds*, was under the influence of rebellious angels who led mankind into immoral and depraved behavior. The second world, under the rule of Satan, the usurper, has also been an evil world. But the third world will be an era of righteousness and of blessing to all the families of the earth under the benevolent rule of Christ.

The last two of these *worlds* or *time frames* are most particularly mentioned in Scripture, and the statements relative to them are in strong contrast. The present, or second period, is called the *present evil world*, not because there is nothing good in it, but because in it evil is permitted to predominate. “*Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.*” (Malachi 3:15) The third world or *time frame* is mentioned as a world *wherein dwelleth righteousness*, not because there will be no evil in it, but because evil will not predominate. The blotting out of evil will be gradual, requiring the entire Millennial Age. Evil will not rule then—it will not prosper. It will no longer be the wicked that will flourish, but “*the righteous shall flourish,*” “*the obedient shall eat the good of the land*” and “*the evil doer shall be cut off.*” (Psalm 72:7; Isaiah 1:19; Psalm 37:9) This is because Christ, the ruler of the *age* to come will instruct the world in righteousness, and truth will prosper.

Jesus said, “*My kingdom is not of this world,*” and until that era or *world to come* does arrive in the full sense, Christ’s kingdom will not completely control the earth. And for this we are taught to hope and pray, “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth...*” For now, Satan is spoken of as the “*ruler of the darkness of this world,*” and therefore “*darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people.*” But, the promise of the *ages to come* is glorious! Ephesians 2:2; 6:12; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Isaiah 60:2

### THE EARTH—GOD’S FOOTSTOOL MADE GLORIOUS

God declares: “*The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool and I will make the place of my feet glorious*” (Isaiah 66:1; 60:13). How *glorious* would the earth be if literally burned up? But when the curse laid on the earth is lifted, and the fruitful conditions of Eden are restored, that *will* be glorious! The Bible certainly supports the latter prospect: “*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.*” Revelation 22:3

When the “*ransomed of the Lord shall return,*” the wilderness shall be habitable and “*the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.*” (Isaiah 35:10,1) Man will *return* to where he was

before the curse of death. He will not return to heaven, because he did not come from heaven. Man, as represented in Adam, started life in the Garden of Eden. Man was ejected from this paradise on earth. From the time of his disobedience in the Garden, he worked with the *thorns and thistles* and eventually died in sorrow. But the Scriptures assure us that “*The earth shall yield her increase.*” (Ezekiel 34:27) In God’s Kingdom, Adam and his children will *return* to an uncursed, blossoming, glorious earth!

“*But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain [God’s Kingdom] of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains... [the many kingdoms of man].* When this prophecy in Micah is fulfilled, energy devoted toward war will be converted to agriculture. Economic security and human dignity will be the inheritance of every individual who has ever lived: “*They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid...*” “*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.*” Micah 4:1-4; Isaiah 65:17

God has not lost control of His vast dominion. He has an all-encompassing plan of rescuing and blessing all of His creation. Man will not be allowed to destroy himself and his earth, neither will God literally burn up the whole earth. He has no limits to His wisdom nor lack of power to execute His promises—but, as seen in the three *ages* or *worlds*, all will be accomplished in His due time.

### THE TIMES OF RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS

For six thousand years God has permitted a reign of evil, but soon He will refresh the earth by “*the times of restitution of all things... spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.*” (Acts 3:20-21) Yes, not only will the earth abide forever, but it will continue, from the *times of restitution* onward—improving to perfection. And, throughout the ages to follow, with perfected man as its caretaker, the earth will bring forth gardens of peaceful beauty beyond anything we can imagine now. Isaiah 35

As some misjudge the skill and wisdom of a great architect by his unfinished work, so also many now misjudge God by his unfinished work. But by and by, when the rough scaffolding of evil, which has been permitted for man’s discipline and overruled for his good, has been removed, and the rubbish cleared away, God’s finished work will universally declare His glorious, loving plans and character. “*As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*” 1 Corinthians 2:9

