

# Mankind's Destiny

*“What is a human being, that you make so much of him; that you set your affections on him?”*

—*Job 7:17,*

*International*

*Standard Version*

**ALL OF THE CONFUSION,** fear and perplexity found in the world today is good cause for many to ask numerous thought-provoking questions. What is man? Why is he here? What is his destiny? With the inability of many to obtain

satisfying answers to these questions, increasing numbers of people are reaching the conclusion that death is the end of human existence. They say, in effect, let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die, and that is the end. In addition, because of the breaking down of ethical and moral values, making merry today for many brings about ignoble and often tragic results.

In the words of our opening text, Job, a righteous man who revered God and turned away from evil, asked similar questions concerning man's purpose and destiny. He did so especially because of the fact that, although he had lived a righteous life, he experienced what seemed to be undeserved trials,

harm and loss. We could say that if anyone had a right to ask such questions, Job did.

### **“WHAT IS MAN?”**

Later, the Psalmist David wrote, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.” (Ps. 8:3-6) Here David asked much the same questions as Job did, but with the additional knowledge imparted to him by God’s Holy Spirit, he provided the basics of the answer, which is key to our understanding of man’s eternal destiny.

David first acknowledges God as the Creator of all things, among these being the “heavens, ... the moon and the stars.” He then turns his attention to the creation of man, whom God made “a little lower than the angels.” We have only a limited knowledge concerning the angels, but the Bible assures us they exist, and that they are more intelligent and powerful than man, and in nearly every way superior to him. Even apart from scriptural evidence, it would be reasonable to suppose that man is not the highest order of being in all the Creator’s vast universe. To suppose otherwise would seem foolish to those who are not overburdened with the weight of their own importance. Imagine a human being, or even a scientist, peering through a telescope into the vast universe, which its powerful lenses bring within

the reach of one's breathtaking view, and then thinking, "I am the most intelligent, powerful and important of all beings that exist."

There is much discussion and debate among mankind's most knowledgeable scientists as to how the universe came into existence, and of the laws which govern the billions of heavenly bodies seen through their most powerful telescopes. Man continually updates his ideas as to how far the universe extends, and when its formation began. In his desire to pursue the answers to these questions, man has discovered that there are certain fixed laws which govern the universe, yet he does not know how or when these laws came into existence.

The scientist has learned that an atom is the smallest unit of ordinary matter that constitutes a chemical element, and that every solid, liquid and gas is composed of atoms. Man is even able to split the atom—but he cannot create one out of nothing. The fact that so many things exist of which we have little or no understanding, either as to how or when they were created, or how the laws which govern them were put into place, should be ample proof that somewhere in this universe there exists intelligence and power far superior to our own.

Starting from the foundation of belief in an all-knowing and powerful Creator, we find that David's answer to the question, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" is very revealing. "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and ... madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands." Man was, in other words, created an earthly being, and given dominion over the earth, his home. David's answer is in agreement with the Bible account of

man's creation, in which we are told that man was commissioned to fill the earth, to subdue it, and to have dominion over everything upon it.—Gen. 1:27,28

The creative record also states that man was created in the image of God, and was thus set apart from the lower animals, having been given superior intelligence. (vs. 26) In view of this, one might well wonder why man today, despite his many attainments, has devolved into such a low state, and why he has so miserably failed in the governing of himself. The Bible also furnishes the answer to this question, for it reveals that man, early in his experience, disobeyed divine law and was condemned to death. Ever since that time man has been traveling over what the Scriptures describe as a “broad way” which leads to destruction. (Matt. 7:13) Throughout the ages, the end of each individual has been death, and now the possibility of destruction threatens the race as a whole.

However, while man indeed disobeyed the divine law, the Creator still loves him. In his love he has made a provision whereby the human race will be rescued from the terrible results of sin and selfishness. Millions have often quoted the beautiful words of John 3:16, but the story of God's loving purpose for man is not fully revealed unless we also include verse 17. This full statement of the Creator's eternal purpose reads, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”—John 3:16,17

Jesus, this only begotten son of the Heavenly Father, said that he would give his flesh, his humanity, for

the life of the world. (John 6:51) Paul speaks of this provision of divine love as a ransom, or corresponding price. He explains that Jesus gave himself “a ransom for all,” and assures us that this will be made known to all “in due time.” The apostle states in this same context that God desires “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

Jesus took the sinner’s place in death, and thus provided a way of escape from condemnation and death. However, nearly two thousand years have passed since Jesus died to make it possible for the human race to live, and still death reigns throughout the earth. Paul reminds us of this situation, and quotes David’s statement that man was made a little lower than the angels, and given dominion over the earth. He then adds, “Now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”—Heb. 2:6-9

“We see Jesus.” That is, we see that he died as a part of God’s program for rescuing mankind from sin and death. This means that the divine plan of salvation is moving forward. However, the Bible reveals that before the “due time” would arrive for the benefits of the “ransom for all” to be fully testified to all people, another important feature of the divine purpose was to be carried out. This special aspect of God’s plan is the selection from the world of mankind of a “little flock” of those willing to follow Jesus in his footsteps of sacrifice, service and suffering, with the assurance that if they are faithful they will live and reign with him.—Luke 12:32; II Tim. 2:11,12

## **WORLD CONVERSION IN THE COMING KINGDOM**

It has been believed by many Christians that when Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into all the world to preach the Gospel he wanted them to convert the world. The thought has been that this worldwide preaching would continue until the second coming of Christ, and that then all the unconverted would be consigned to either some form of eternal torment or, at a minimum, to eternal separation from God, and that the earth itself would then be burned up—ceasing to ever again exist. These suppositions have been based on the belief that it is only in this life that anyone has an opportunity to accept Christ, and through him gain life. The Bible, however, tells us that the conversion of the world will not be accomplished until the age of Christ's kingdom.—Acts 17:31; II Tim. 4:1

Jesus prophesied that in the age following his death and resurrection, the “gospel” would be preached worldwide as a witness, or testimony, to all people, but he did not indicate the purpose as being that of world conversion. (Matt. 24:14) During the present Gospel Age, the hearts of some have been reached by the message, and these have been called to sacrifice and suffer with Jesus. They are admonished to present themselves a “living sacrifice,” with the assurance that their sacrifice will be acceptable to God because of the cleansing power of Jesus' blood.—Rom. 12:1,2; I John 1:7

By faith these are invited to lay down their lives in sacrifice and service for the Lord. The world often sees no difference between their life and its associated experiences and that of others. However, the Heavenly Father knows the difference, and through

his Son has promised that those who are faithful in their present walk of sacrifice, even unto death, shall receive a “crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) These are also promised that they will be brought forth in “the first resurrection” to live and “reign with Christ.” (Rev. 20:4,6) Jesus encouraged all such, saying, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

Another misconception of the plan of God is that Christ established his kingdom at the beginning of the present age, and that with each new convert the kingdom expands. As we have just seen, the work of the present age has been the selection of those who will reign with Jesus when God’s kingdom, which millions continue to pray for, is established “in earth.” (Matt. 6:10) It will be through the reign of Christ that man, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, will be given a full opportunity to be restored to human life here on earth, and receive again that dominion which he also lost because of disobedience. As for the earth itself, the Bible assures us that “the earth abideth for ever,” and that God “created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited.”—Eccles. 1:4; Isa. 45:18

Thus, while Paul says, “we see not yet all things put under” man, we do see that the plan of God toward this end is progressing. We believe that the work of selecting those who will live and reign with Christ is nearing completion, because the chaotic conditions in the world today are undoubtedly those described in the Bible as taking place at the end of the age. (Zeph. 3:8,9; Matt. 24:21,22; II Pet. 3:11-13) This indicates that the Messianic kingdom is at the door, which in turn means that the

promised uplift of mankind from sin and death is soon to commence.

## **WORLD TO BE ENLIGHTENED**

In a symbolic description of the kingdom, Micah wrote that “the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Micah 4:1-4) We understand that in this prophecy “Zion” symbolizes the heavenly phase of the Messianic kingdom, composed of Christ and his faithful followers exalted to heavenly glory. (Rev. 14:1) “Jerusalem” represents the visible, human phase of the kingdom, whose instructors and rulers will be made up of the ancient servants of God—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and many others—who proved their loyalty to him prior to the First Advent of Jesus.—Zech. 14:8,9,16-19; Ps. 45:16; Heb. 11:13,35-40

In Micah’s prophecy we are told that in Messiah’s kingdom the Lord “shall judge among many people.” This judgment will be based on full and accurate knowledge. In the New Testament we are informed that during this period of judgment the “books” of divine revelation will be opened for man’s learning. (Rev. 20:12) In Isaiah 26:9 we are informed that when the Lord’s judgments are in the earth, “the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness,” and in Psalm 96:13 we are told that God will judge the people with his truth. The result of this will be that the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea,” when all shall know the Lord, “from the least ... unto the greatest.”—Isa. 11:9; Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11

With the people fully enlightened concerning God and his will for them, they will have an unbiased and

fair opportunity to accept his loving provision through Christ, and upon this basis, continue to live. This great blessing of knowledge and opportunity will not be limited to the living generation when the work of judgment begins, for we are informed that then “the dead, small and great, [will] stand before God.” (Rev. 20:12) This does not mean that all the billions of the dead will be awakened from the sleep of death and be immediately judged at one moment in time, or in one literal twenty-four hour day. It is simply reminding us that throughout the thousand year “day” of the judgment and kingdom period, all who have ever lived upon the earth will come into remembrance before God, be brought back from the tomb, and that the books of divine instruction will be opened for all of them.

When those “books” are opened, mankind will learn that the great Creator of the universe is not a God of torment, nor that he has no interest in his human creation. They will learn, instead, that he is a God of love—a love so great that he gave his only begotten Son to die for them. They will then understand that they are receiving an opportunity of believing on him, obeying the laws of his kingdom, and upon the basis of this belief and obedience, of living forever on this fruitful and plenteous earth as perfect human beings.

Then the people will understand mankind’s destiny, and the answer to the questions raised by Job, David and so many others down through the ages. In the meantime, however, we see the manifestations of sin and selfishness throughout the earth more now than ever before. In Psalm 30:5 the whole period of sin and death is described as

a nighttime of weeping, but we are told that while “weeping may endure for a night, ... joy cometh in the morning.” The psalmist indicates that humanity’s nighttime of weeping has been due to the withdrawal of divine favor because of sin. This has caused a veil of darkness to settle down over the race which has blocked out human peace and happiness. The return of divine favor, however, will bring the promised joy “in the morning” of the kingdom day.

God will cause his face to shine once again upon mankind. This will dispel the darkness of the world’s night of weeping. The light of his countenance will refresh and bless all who accept the provisions of God’s grace in that daytime of divine favor, and who obey the righteous and just laws of the kingdom of Christ then operating throughout the earth.

Man has long groped through the darkness in an endeavor to find some words of comfort and assurance that out of all this confusion of uncertainty and affliction, sometime, somewhere, there will come a happy tomorrow. In so doing, many have laid hold upon the poisoned waters of error and superstition, the drinking of which, instead of refreshing their souls, has filled their minds with fear and foreboding which has often plagued them throughout their lives. Satan, the great deceiver, has always been ready to offer his noxious potions, but in the kingdom he will be bound and able to “deceive the nations no more.”—II Cor. 4:4; I Pet. 5:8; Rev. 20:1-3

The return of God’s favor will result in what Peter described as “times of restitution of all things.” (Acts 3:20,21) The word “restitution” denotes restoration

to a former condition. During his earthly ministry Jesus said that he had come “to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10) His First Advent prepared the way for actual restoration—the restitution which Peter said had been foretold by all God’s holy prophets. Each of the prophets contributes to the glorious melody of hope and inspiration which this divine purpose for man is bound to engender in the hearts of those who hear and believe. Summarized below is some of that prophetic testimony.

Moses recorded God’s promise to Abraham that through his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) David foretold the coming kingdom of righteousness and described the abundance of its blessings. (Ps. 72:1-20) Isaiah told of the time when death would be swallowed up in victory, and when God would wipe away tears from all faces. He also forecast that in the kingdom the people would build houses, and inhabit them, plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.—Isa. 25:6-9; 65:20-22

Jeremiah, another of God’s holy prophets, described the great change that will come about in human experience, assuring us that it no longer will be true that men and women will die because of inherited sins and weaknesses. He declared that the people will not then say, “The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” (Jer. 31:29) Ezekiel assured us that both Jews and Gentiles will be restored to life, returning to their former estate. (Ezek. 16:53-63) Daniel, likewise, emphasized the permanence of Christ’s kingdom, saying that those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.—Dan. 2:44; 12:2

The Prophet Hosea assured us that God will be a “plague” to death until its prisoners are released, and that death itself will be destroyed. (Hos. 13:14) Obadiah informed us that when the kingdom of God is operating in the earth, Saviors shall come up on mount Zion. (Obad. 1:21) Jesus is the great Savior of the people, and, as we have seen, associated with him will be those who have suffered and died with him during the present age.

In Malachi 4:2 we read that “the Sun of Righteousness” will rise with “healing in his wings.” What a beautiful illustration of the enlightening and healing powers of Christ’s kingdom! From the time these healing powers of “the Sun of Righteousness” begin to manifest themselves, those who respond will feel their restorative effects.

The work of the kingdom will continue for a thousand years. (Rev. 20:6) Not until the end of that age of healing sunshine will all the mists of darkness be scattered, and all the desert conditions of the past made fruitful and plenteous. (Isa. 35:1-10) It will require the entire “day” of Christ’s kingdom to enlighten, heal and bless all the previously dark corners of the earth and of human minds, hearts and bodies.

All who respond in belief and loving obedience will be blessed eternally as a result of the life-giving rays of “the Sun of Righteousness.” Then, the earth will have been cleansed from sin, and mankind’s eternal destiny will be to live in perfection forever upon this beautiful planet Earth. Thus it will be true again, as it was before sin entered the world, that God, our loving Creator and Heavenly Father, will “be all in all.”—I Cor. 15:22-28 ■