



THE END...AND THE GREAT BEGINNING

A Message from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles

In a continuing series of articles regarding the *Last Dispensation of Time*, this is the sixth and final article, focusing on the *Last Days*

Not everyone is driven by an insatiable curiosity to understand all of the mysteries concerning the last days and the resurrection. It is wonderful and joyous just to know that Christ arose, that all mankind shall, and that the privilege of taking part in the *First Resurrection* (which is attainable by obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ during this life) affords immunity from the second death: eternal separation from God to dwell permanently in outer darkness. Complete understanding of these mysteries is not prerequisite for salvation. Still, many are blessed in discovering that the scriptures reveal a good deal about the end of time and the eternity that follows. We offer an overview of the most important sequence we anticipate:

- *The Peaceful Reign*
- *The First Resurrection*
- *The Second Resurrection*

We know that the battle for the souls of mankind began in the Garden of Eden where God established that Adam and Eve could dwell forever in His presence so long as they abstained from the *Tree of Knowledge*. Although Adam fell, God, in His wisdom, prepared the way of salvation whereby a Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come to redeem the children of men from the fall and that redemption would provide mankind with the freedom to act for themselves to choose liberty and eternal life, through the mediation of the Savior, or captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of that enemy who, from the beginning, has sought to make all men as miserable as he is. (*2 Nephi 2:14-27*) This battle does not go on forever, it will end with triumph for the Lord and eternal reward for all who will serve Him.

Peaceful Reign (Zion)

Going back a bit in this series of articles, we wrote about the *Peaceful Reign* that occurs in this life and sets the stage for the end of mortal life and the sudden onset

of the *First Resurrection*. We established that the conditions and events associated with *The Peaceful Reign* result in the tremendous gathering of God's people – all who will obey the Gospel and inherit the ancient promises to Israel – to live under Christ in righteous unity, so great that the devil has no power.

This immense gathering may be difficult to comprehend. Scriptures describe it in physical terms, for example:

- *And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. (Isaiah 2:2)*
- *...a New Jerusalem should be built up upon this land, unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph, for which things there has been a type. (Ether 13:6; 3 Nephi 21:23)*

But it is also described in spiritual terms, for example:

- *...Behold there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations, and she is the whore of all the earth. ...And when the day cometh that the wrath of God is poured out upon the mother of harlots, which is the great and abominable church of all the earth, whose foundation is the devil, then, at that day, the work of the Father shall commence, in preparing the way for the fulfilling of his covenants, which he hath made to his people who are the house of Israel. (1 Nephi 14:1-17)*
- *And he gathereth his children from the four quarters of the earth; and he numbereth his sheep, and they know him; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and he shall feed his sheep, and in him they shall find pasture. And because of the righteousness of his people Satan has no power over the hearts of the people, for they dwell in righteousness, and the Holy One of Israel reigneth. (1 Nephi 22:16-28)*

The extended scriptures referenced above, along with others, inform us that this gathering of the righteous believers in Christ includes a separation from other people according to the hardness of their hearts. This dividing process will be brought about with destructive forces implemented by the power of God. Considering this process, take special note of *1 Nephi 22:17, 22*, which emphasizes the preservation of the righteous who “need not fear.” Jesus also verifies this preservation amidst turmoil: *But there shall not a hair of your head perish. (Luke 21:17-18)* (Again, please review the earlier article in this series for more detail regarding the *Peaceful Reign*.)

This “marvelous” and “wonderful” work was initiated with the restoration of the Gospel and the revelation of the Book of Mormon. Regardless of how soon this

part of the plan of God will culminate in the restoration of Israel and the *Peaceful Reign*, right now it is critical that each of us understands and remains aware of personal preparedness and diligence in God's love in order to bring about the ultimate development of unity and righteousness which will render Satan powerless. Our mutual goal - which will be realized in the *Peaceful Reign* - is to become fully ready for Jesus's return by becoming like Him. (*1 Nephi 13:32-39; Moroni 7:46-48; John 3:2*)

We get hints about conditions in the *Peaceful Reign* by reading of other times when the Church was at its best. (*Acts 2:31-4:38; 4 Nephi*) These times are characterized by phrases such as: one accord, healing the sick, meeting together, no contention, all things common, one heart and one soul. As wonderful as those periods were, both were eventually corrupted as the carnal nature of man rose up within the church and robbed them of their peace, joy, and unity. The *Peaceful Reign* will not fade away in that manner, although the evil one will desperately try to disrupt. *The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come.* As opposition and turmoil flare up and deception rises, the Lord, in His mercy, will shorten the days of tribulation for the sake of the saints. (*Matt. 24: 4-24*)

Note: This article predominantly utilizes simple scriptural references and intentionally avoids interpretation of many relevant but symbolic or mysterious scriptures and prophecies which various individuals understand or speculate in different ways. As time passes, all prophecies will come to pass and interpretation will become a matter of witness.

First Resurrection

As the end of the world approaches, we see that the people of God will reach a new zenith (*Peaceful Reign*) in their righteousness and unity while the world whirls in turmoil and tribulation as the enemy seeks to pull the saints into this vortex of destruction along with all the unbelieving. But for the righteous elects' sake, God will bring about the end while they endure, prepared in faith and righteousness for Christ's return. John saw that God would seal His servants before He brings about the end of the world. (*Rev. 7:1-3*) Jesus will return triumphantly in power and great glory to claim His own – both the dead and the living - as the earth falls to ultimate destruction. (*Matt. 24:25-31*)

- *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened. And the moon shall not give her light. And the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (*Matt.24:29-31; Rev. 6:12-17; Rev. 8*)*

- ... 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)

So the dead in Christ - those who will have come to know Jesus, believed and died faithful – will be first to resurrect at His coming. Also at this time, the living faithful will be taken up and transformed to the state of resurrected immortality. (Remember from the previous articles on the resurrections, that at the time of His resurrection, those who had died faithfully in the hope of Christ resurrected with Him.) Speaking of the saints alive at Christ's return, Paul wrote:

- ... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Cor. 15:50-54)

With the resurrection of Christ's servants and the end of the world, Satan will be cast into a bottomless pit, sealed there for a thousand years so that he will be unable to deceive the nations any more until the thousand years are complete when he will be loosed again for a little while. (Rev. 20:1-3) At this point, the world has been destroyed; there is no more mortal life. John saw thrones occupied by the resurrected saints, martyred for their witness of Jesus and the word of God, and those who would not worship the enemy or take on his mark. These will live and reign with Christ for the thousand years. (Rev. 20:4, Rev. 13:11-18, 14:8-10, 15:2, 16:2, 19:20) This is the *First Resurrection*. Those who resurrect at this time shall be immune from any further threat and shall reign as priests with Christ for the thousand years. (Rev 20:5-6) This 1000-year period is frequently referred to as the *Millennium* and is differentiated from the *Peaceful Reign*. We do not use the term *Rapture* in reference to the *First Resurrection* because of other understandings associated with that term.

Second Resurrection

The rest of the dead will not live again until the end of 1000 years (Rev 20:5). After 1000 years, Satan will be loosed and will go out to deceive the nations in the four quarters of the earth – to gather them to battle, their number being as the sands of the sea. (Rev 20:7-8) Here we must ponder “the nations.”

- Everyone dead or alive in Christ has already resurrected. Those participating in the *First Resurrection* will not be subject to the second death, i.e., will not be subject to deception, destruction, or separation from God.

- With the *First Resurrection* there will be great plagues and destruction that destroy the earth and melt the elements. The saints will resurrect and reign with Christ. Who will be left? Only the souls of the dead who still await resurrection.
- This cannot be a “flesh and blood” picture. “The nations” must refer to those who will resurrect after the 1000 years. Refer again to the previous articles on the Resurrections: Souls await their resurrection in a place consisting of Paradise and outer darkness. They will be consigned to one or the other according to their respective spirits in which they lived their lives. Besides those “dead in Christ” who resurrect at the *First Resurrection*, others among the dead at the time of the *First Resurrection* will retain various “spirits” – some examples:
 - Some will have never learned of Christ but will have been sincerely righteous according to their own understanding.
 - Others who never learned of Christ will not have lived up to their own understanding of righteousness.
 - Some will have learned of Christ incompletely or under erroneous teaching.
 - Some will have hearts too hard to receive Christ.
 - Some will have learned of Christ but, yielding to the carnal nature, procrastinated repentance.
 - Some will have accepted Christ at a point in their lives but left Him later.
 - Some will have been purposefully evil in this life.

Refer to the previous articles in this series about the resurrections to recall that Jesus preached to the souls in prison before He resurrected. Without knowing details that the scriptures do not provide, we can rest assured that Jesus will also deal justly with all souls before the second resurrection according to the spirits they retain from their lives and their assignments to Paradise or outer darkness. As discussed in our previous article, truly ignorant sin has been atoned for, living in true ignorance of the will of God has been atoned for, little children carry no sin, those who live as righteously as they know how will continue in that desire. Likewise, the hard-hearted will remain so, those who do evil will retain that desire, and anyone who procrastinates repentance throughout life will find it impossible to repent after death. (*Mosiah 3:11; Alma 34:32-35, 20:17; Mormon 9:12-14; Alma 41:2-8; 2 Nephi 9:22-39; Hel. 14:29-31*)

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. Nevertheless, God will take measures to ensure that His promises are kept and His plan preserved. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. (Rev. 20:7-9)

At this point, the devil will be permanently cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented forever and ever. (*Rev. 20:10*) And God will sit on His throne to judge all of the rest of the dead according to their works in life. *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:11-15; Mosiah 16:1-13; Refer also to previous two articles on the Resurrections.)*

New Heaven and New Earth

The first heaven and the first earth will have passed away and a new heaven and a new earth will be established with the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. This will be the tabernacle of God in which resurrected men will dwell with God for eternity. This is the end of time and the new beginning. This is our great ambition, the purpose of our lives: to be with God for eternity without death, sorrow, crying, or pain as sons and daughters of God. (*Rev. 21:1-7*)

Now is the time to secure our place in this glorious, eternal scenario.

In the Love of God,

The Quorum of Twelve Apostles

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