

The End of the World

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Modern Christians are made fun of for their view of the “End of the World” or “The Final Judgment”. Some Catholics have taken it so far that they actually believe in the physical resurrection of the dead, causing many to bury their dead in a concrete cask so that the physical parts will be available for this event. Where did this thinking go astray to end up with such an illogical belief?

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63)

Even at the time of Jesus, people did not understand this very basic concept about His words: they are all spiritual in nature and have little or no relationship to the physical/material world. Origen reminds us of this often enough in his commentaries that there are so many things Jesus said, in relation to His Kingdom for example, that obviously had no literal interpretation. So, if we examine the words of Jesus about the “The Final Judgment” with this in mind, maybe we can find a logical explanation.

During his time of teaching, Jesus told us that the Father had given Him the authority to judge the world; every soul on Earth or in Hell. (Cf. John 6:27) He tells us that the hour is coming when all the souls will hear His voice and He will separate them into two groups: those who earned the right to go to Heaven and those who will be sentenced in court. (Cf. John 5:26-29) Many Christians take this to mean that at some point in the future all will be judged with some going to everlasting life and the rest into eternal damnation.

But doesn't this interpretation contradict the good news from Jesus? Jesus tells us that it is the Will of God that none of His children be lost. (Cf. John 6:39-40 and Luke 15:4-7) Jesus also tells us that He has come to save the whole world and not condemn it. (John 3:17) We must take into account that we cannot comprehend the patience of God, and that He truly is patient enough to make sure that none of His children perish. (Cf. 2 Peter 3:8-9) In the parable of “the prodigal son”, Jesus attempts to explain the Father's patience to us. If we take Lucifer to be the prodigal son Jesus is talking about, who took his inheritance and squandered it, we can see that he now lives much worse off than any of those in Heaven. How long will it be before he comes to his senses and starts his way back to God? (Cf. Luke 15:11-31) How long will it be before the Morning Star, Lucifer rises in our hearts? (Cf. Is. 14:12 and 2 Peter 1:19)

The early Christian teaching of the good news had a more humane explanation of the Final Judgment that truly allowed for all to be eventually saved. Near the end of His life, Jesus tells us that the hour has come for the world to be judged and when the king of this world will be dethroned. (Cf. John 12:31-32) When He had successfully passed all His tests on Earth, Jesus was ready to go down into Hell and meet His adversary face-to-face. The bible available to us today gives little reference to the three days that Jesus spent in Hell. In John's revelation there are some references to the event, but the picture that he is able to tell us is not precise. From St. Fulbert of Chartres (d. 1028) we have a poetic rendition of this occurrence which is a little easier to understand than those images from John. (Rev. 12:3-4, 12:7-9, 20:1-3)

...For Judah's Lion bursts his chains,

*crushing the serpent's head;
and cries aloud through death's domains
to wake the imprisoned dead.*

*Devouring depths of hell their prey
at his command restore;
his ransomed hosts pursue their way
where Jesus goes before...*

If we take these images along with the parable of “the sheep and goats” we can come to the following explanation of these three days in Hell. After His death on the cross, the spirit of Jesus went to Paradise (Cf. Luke 23:43) where He met the Archangel Michael and his army. Jesus then led this army into Hell and conquered Lucifer. Upon His victory, Jesus passed final judgment on Lucifer. This final judgment is to last until the world is no longer needed for the restoration of the fallen (dead). This was the new epoch that was prophesied in which Lucifer’s (Death’s) unlimited power over the inhabitants of Earth and Hell was to be curtailed.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (Isaiah 25:81) O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (Hosea 13:14) The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:54-57)

After the Final Judgment, Jesus gathered His sheep and sorted them out. Those who had proven their loyalty to Him and God were allowed to follow Him into Heaven and Eternal Life, like Abraham and Moses. Those who had not yet shown their loyalty to Him are now subject to the conditions of the Final Judgment, under which they must actively chose to follow Jesus and prove their loyalty to Him on Earth. (Cf. Matt. 25:31-46) The current interpretation of the bible is that this Judgment will last an eternity. It is impossible for a mortal to comprehend a spiritual eternity, but the Judgment will certainly last a human eternity, since the remaining useful life of the Earth will stretch for billions of years, and the prodigal son finally returns.