

HEAVENS WILL PASS AWAY ?

Billy Graham once said, "someday you will hear that I am dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now! I will just have changed my address, and gone into the presence of God." He passed away earlier this year, which makes the prospect of heaven seem that much closer for many. But "heaven" and "heavens" are different, as 2Peter 3:10 relates, "*the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*" All this will come at an unexpected time in an unequalled way, and three human reactions include dread, delight, and diligence.

1- Do you dread an unexpected time? Perhaps you've heard the acronym TEOTWAWKI, "the end of the world as we know it." That's literally what's coming. Verse 12 says, "*the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.*" We've previously described the "day of the Lord" pictured in the Old Testament, as proximate judgment on Israel or its enemies, for disobedience of God's commands. There is also a final Day of the Lord, of God's judgment in conjunction with the second coming of Christ. That's what Peter has in view, which he expresses in cataclysmic language.

Peter points out that God Himself will do this. Just as chapter 2 reminds how God brought the world into existence through His own creation of all things out of nothing, and that God brought the global impact of Noah's worldwide flood to rid the world of corruption, so an unparalleled day of the Lord is yet to come. The difference this time is that the heavens will pass away and be dissolved and melt. Not in nuclear war, but burned by the fire of God's divine judgment. Peter is particularly reminding the scoffers and false teachers that all of God's promises come to pass. That day is known only to God, but it is coming.

2- Do you dread an unequalled event? Let's look at Peter's proclamation phrase by phrase. "*The heavens will pass away with a roar*" expands on 2Peter 3:7 and is an echo of Isaiah 34:4, the vengeance of God in judgment on the nations, as the host of heaven will rot away and the skies roll up like a scroll. Isaiah 64 speaks of God rending the heavens and coming down like fire. Revelation 6:14 says the sky vanished like a scroll being rolled up, and 20:11 says at His presence earth and sky fled away with a roar, a loud crackling like a roaring fire. Do you feel the dread of such terrible things?

When Peter speaks of the heavenly bodies being *burned up and dissolved*, the Greek work "stoicheia" refers to elements. Not microscopic molecules of the ancient elements of the world: earth, air, fire, water. Peter's use is like Old Testament apocalyptic pictures on the macroscopic level, of heavenly celestial bodies: sun, moon, stars, planets. As in Joel 2:30-32 and Matthew 24:29,35, *the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give light, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken, and heaven and earth will pass away.* Unequaled in history. On God's day. By God's fire.

3- Do you dread having everything exposed? The heavenly objects will be destroyed, but Peter says "*the earth and the works done on it will be exposed.*" The picture is like a fast-moving prairie or forest fire that doesn't consume every tree trunk, but lays bare the landscape and exposes all the rubble, of human activity, machinery, buildings, etc. Peter says to the scoffers and false teachers and all who despise the authority of God's Word and instead indulge in their passions, lusts, and sins, "take note" - ALL will be revealed on judgment day! Hebrews 4:12 declares "*the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*" God knows all. And all, even everything you've tried to hide, all will be revealed. On an unexpected day, in an unequalled way, everything will be exposed.

Think carefully about this. God created a perfect world. It was corrupted by human sin, then judged by water as the global flood covered the earth. And in the future at the end all things will be judged by fire. Every evil thing, every thing wrong ever done by you, or too you, or anyone else, will all be exposed. And God will take care of it, in His righteous judgment. This includes every thing you have thought or said and done, and all those things you have failed to do or say. The NIV says it will be "*laid bare*" as the blazing fire of God's holy judgment will destroy the heavens but not the earth.

The word "exposed" or "found" that Peter uses is also in 2Peter 3:14, "*be diligent to be found by Him without blemish*" and in 1Peter 1:7, "*like gold tested by fire may be found to result in glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" which 1:3 says is "*resurrection to an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, kept in heaven.*" In the same way, God's fire will expose all that survives. RC Sproul notes, "God is not going to annihilate the old in order to create the new. He is going to redeem the old, shaping it into what he wants it to be." For the believer this is not dread, but delight. That's the good news we'll explore next time! ☐