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THE LAST DAYS

3.1 THE MEANING OF THE LAST DAYS

Due to the crime of the Fall, the three great blessings God had granted our first ancestors were not fulfilled based on God's love and Principle, but instead were actualized in an unprincipled way under the tutelage of Satan. Human history since then has been the history of God's providence of restoration. Despite its evil beginning, the world under the sovereignty of Satan must one day be transformed into the world

where goodness reigns, where the three great blessings are fulfilled centered on God. The Messiah comes at this time of transformation.

The Last Days is this time, when the evil world under satanic sovereignty is transformed into the ideal world under God's sovereignty. Hell on earth will be transformed into the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Therefore, it will not be a day of fear when the world will be destroyed by global catastrophes, as many Christians have believed. In fact, it will be a day of joy, when the cherished hope of humankind, the desire of the ages, will be realized.

Since human beings fell, God has attempted more than once to consummate His providence to put an end to the sinful world and restore the original, good world. Nevertheless, at each attempt, human beings failed to fulfill their portion of responsibility, thus thoroughly frustrating the Will of God. Consequently, dispensations of the Last Days have been repeated several times. This can be confirmed by a close study of the Bible.

3.1.1 NOAH'S DAY WAS THE LAST DAYS

God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth." (Gen. 6:13) This indicates that Noah's day was the Last Days. God wanted to destroy the corrupt, evil world which had been ruled by Satan since the time of the human Fall. He intended once and for all to purge sinful history, biblically reckoned as 1,600 years, by the Flood. In its aftermath, God intended to raise up Noah's family, who worshipped Him and no other, and resurrect the world of God's sovereignty upon the foundation of their faith. This is how the time of Noah can be considered the Last Days. Nonetheless, when Ham, the second son of Noah, committed a sinful act which reaffirmed the Fall, Noah's family could not fulfill its portion of responsibility on behalf of humankind, and the Will of God was frustrated. (Gen. 9:22)

3.1.2 JESUS' DAY WAS THE LAST DAYS

God has foreordained the fulfillment of His Will; hence, the goal of the providence of restoration is unchanging and shall be fulfilled without fail. Therefore, even though the providence of restoration was not accomplished through Noah, God called upon other prophets to prepare anew the basis of faith. Upon this foundation, God sent Jesus to vanquish the satanic sovereignty which has held this world in thrall and to establish the God-centered ideal world. Accordingly, Jesus' day was also the Last Days. This is why

Jesus said that he came to bring judgment, (John 5:22) and why Malachi prophesied of Jesus' coming:

Behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up . . . so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. -Malachi 4:1.

Jesus came to restore the original, ideal world. However, when the people of Israel did not believe in him, the human portion of responsibility was left unaccomplished. This meant that the fulfillment of the Will of God had to be prolonged until Christ's Second Advent.

3.1.3 THE DAY OF CHRIST'S SECOND ADVENT IS THE LAST DAYS

When the disbelief of the chosen people led Jesus to go the way of the cross, he could accomplish only spiritual salvation. It remains for him to return and accomplish the goal of the providence of restoration both spiritually and physically and restore the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Hence, the day of the Christ's Second Advent is also the Last Days. For this reason Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man" (Luke 17:26) and prophesied that many natural calamities would break out at his return. (Matt. 24:7, 29)

3.2 BIBLE VERSES CONCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE LAST DAYS

Many Christians believe that in the Last Days natural calamities and radical changes beyond the imagination of modern men will take place, as is literally written in the Bible. However, if they understood that human history is the history of God's providence, which has been restoring the world to the original state intended by God at the Creation, then they would know that the signs of the Last Days prophesied in the Bible will not take place literally. Let us investigate what the prophecies concerning the Last Days actually symbolize.

3.2.1 HEAVEN AND EARTH DESTROYED, AND A NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH CREATED

It is written that God determined to destroy the earth in Noah's time. (Gen. 6:13) Noah's time was the Last Days, yet the world was not destroyed. The earth is eternal, as the following verses indicate: "A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever;" (Eccl. 1:4) "He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever." (Ps. 78:69) The earth was created as the object partner of God. God, the subject partner, is eternal; likewise, earth, the object

partner, should also be eternal. Almighty God would never be pleased with having created a world so fragile it could possibly perish because of Satan. What, then, is the meaning of the prophecies of the earth's destruction in the Last Days? For instance:

The heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. -2 Pet. 3:12-13.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. -Rev. 21:1; cf. Isa. 66:22.

To destroy a nation is to overthrow its sovereignty, while to erect a new nation is to establish a new sovereignty. Likewise, the prophecies that heaven and earth will be destroyed mean that the tyranny of Satan will be overthrown. To create a new heaven and new earth means to restore heaven and earth to God's sovereignty founded on Christ.

3.2.2 HEAVEN AND EARTH JUDGED BY FIRE

What is the meaning of the prophecy that in the Last Days "the heavens will be kindled and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire"? (2 Pet. 3:12) Malachi, prophesying of Jesus to come, spoke of a day burning with the fire of judgment. (Mal. 4:1) Jesus came into the world to cast this judgment, as he said, "For judgment I came into this world." (John 9:39) Jesus also said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth." (Luke 12:49) "Fire" here represents the means of the judgment for which Jesus came into the world. Nevertheless, there is no record that in his time Jesus judged the world with literal fire. The verses referring to fire must be symbolic. It is written, "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord?" (Jer. 23:29) Therefore, judgment by fire represents judgment by the Word of God.

Let us look for some biblical examples concerning judgment by the Word: "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day." (John 12:48) "The lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth," (2 Thess. 2:8) that is, by his word. Moreover, "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked." (Isa. 11:4) "He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24) It follows that the judgment by fire which Jesus came to bring was the judgment by the Word.

What is the reason that Jesus judges by the Word? Human beings are created through the Word. (John 1:3) God's ideal of creation was that the first human ancestors fulfill the purpose of the Word by incarnating the Word. Yet they did not keep the Word of God and fell; thus, they failed to fulfill the purpose of the Word. Since then, God has tried to fulfill the purpose of the Word by recreating fallen human beings through the Word. This is the providence of restoration based on truth, the Word as revealed in the Scriptures. It is written, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." (John 1:14) Jesus completely realized the Word. He will come again as the standard of the judgment by the Word and judge the extent to which humanity has fulfilled the purpose of the Word. Judgment in this context contributes to the attainment of the goal of restoration, which is the realization of the purpose of the Word. Hence, in the course of the providence, the Word must be set up as the standard through which judgment can be carried out. Jesus lamented, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49) As the incarnation of the Word, (John 1:14) he was grieved that the people of Israel did not receive the life-giving words which he proclaimed.

3.2.3 THE DEAD RISING FROM THEIR TOMBS

It is written in the Bible that in the Last Days the dead will rise from their graves:

With the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. . . the dead in Christ will rise first. -1 Thessalonians 4: 16.

We can understand the meaning of this prophecy by examining a similar event, when the dead rose from their tombs at the time of Jesus' death:

The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. -Matthew 27: 52-53.

This verse does not mean that the decomposed bodies of the saints literally rose up from their graves. If the physical bodies of the saints of the Old Testament Age had actually risen from their tombs and appeared before many people in Jerusalem, they would certainly have testified to the people about Jesus, since they already knew that he was the Messiah. After hearing such testimony, who among the inhabitants of Jerusalem would not have believed in the crucified Jesus? Additionally, if the saints really had risen from their tombs in the flesh, then surely their deeds would have been recorded in the Bible. However, we find no such records.

What does the Scripture mean when it says that the bodies of the saints rose from their tombs? This record was made by people who could perceive the spirits of the past saints being resurrected spiritually and appearing on the earth. This is much like Moses and Elijah who, as spirits, briefly appeared before Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. (Matt. 17:3) What does “the tomb” symbolize? The realm of form spirits, the region of the spirit world where the spirits of the Old Testament saints were abiding, appears to be a dark place when viewed from Paradise, the realm of the spirit world opened up by Jesus. Hence, it is referred to as a tomb. The spirits of these saints had all lived in that lower region of the spirit world before they appeared to spiritually-attuned believers on the earth.

3.2.4 PEOPLE ON EARTH CAUGHT UP TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR

Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. -1 Thess. 4:17

The “air” mentioned in this verse does not refer to the sky over our heads. In the Bible, “earth” is often a symbol for the fallen world under the sway of evil sovereignty, while “Heaven” is often a symbol for the sinless world of good sovereignty. The omnipresent God certainly dwells everywhere on the earth, yet we pray, “Our Father who art in heaven.” (Matt. 6:9) Even though Jesus was born on the earth, he is referred to as “he who descended from Heaven, the Son of man.” (John 3:13) Meeting the Lord in the air means that the saints will receive the Lord in the world of good sovereignty when Christ comes again and restores the Kingdom of Heaven on earth by defeating the kingdom of Satan.

3.2.5 THE SUN DARKENED, THE MOON NOT GIVING LIGHT AND THE STARS FALLING FROM HEAVEN

In the Last Days, Jesus said, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven.” (Matt. 24:29) How are we to understand this verse?

It is written that Joseph, the eleventh of the twelve sons of Jacob, had a dream:

Then he dreamed another dream, and told it to his brothers, and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream; and behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” But when he told it to his father and

to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?” -Gen. 37: 9-10.

When Joseph later became the prime minister of Egypt, his parents and brothers bowed down before him, as the dream had foretold. In his dream, the sun and moon symbolized the parents, while the stars symbolized their children. As will be explained, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the True Parents who came to give rebirth to humanity in place of Adam and Eve. Therefore, in this prophecy from Matthew, the sun and moon represent Jesus and the Holy Spirit, while the stars represent the faithful believers who are their children. Elsewhere, Jesus is likened to the true light because he came as the incarnation of the Word and shone forth the light of truth. (John 1: 9,14) Here, the sunlight means the light of the words of Jesus, and the moonlight means the light of the Holy Spirit, who came as the Spirit of truth. (John 16:13)

For the sun to be darkened and the moon to lose its light means that the New Testament Word given by Jesus and the Holy Spirit will lose its luster. How can the Word as revealed in the New Testament possibly lose its light? The Old Testament Word was eclipsed when Jesus and the Holy Spirit came and gave us the New Testament Word, which fulfilled the Old Testament Word. (2 Cor. 3:7-11) Likewise, when Christ returns and gives the new truth in order to fulfill the New Testament Word and build a new heaven and new earth, (Rev. 21:1) the Word which he gave at his first coming will lose its light. It is said that the Word will lose its light because, with the coming of a new era, the period of the mission of the old truth will have lapsed.

The prophecy that the stars will fall from heaven signifies that in the Last Days many faithful Christian believers will make a misstep and fall from God’s grace. At the time of Jesus, the leaders of the Jewish people were all yearning for the coming of the Messiah, but they met their downfall when they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah and opposed him. Likewise, Christians who have been anxiously awaiting the return of Jesus are likely to make the same misjudgment and fall when he actually returns.

Jesus asked, “Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8) On another occasion he said he would declare to devout believers, “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.” (Matt. 7:23) Jesus gave these warnings to the Christians of the Last Days because he foresaw that they would be likely to disbelieve and trespass against him at his Second Advent.

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