

13. Images of the End (2Q 2025 Allusions, Images, Symbols)

Biblical material: Matt. 12:38–42; Jonah 3:5–10; Rev. 18:4; Dan. 5:1–31; Rev. 16:12–19; 2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Jonah 1:9.

Quotes

- Our earth is degenerate in these latter days; bribery and corruption are common; children no longer obey their parents; and the end of the world is evidently approaching. *Assyrian clay tablet 2800 B.C.*
- To be brutally frank, we're not going to make it. The human race is doomed... Life on Earth will then turn out to have been a temporary anomaly, a pale flicker, a brief cry in the darkness and silence, seen and heard only by God. *Bryan Appleyard*
- It happened that a fire broke out backstage in a theater. The clown came out to inform the public. They thought it was a jest and applauded. He repeated his warning. They shouted even louder. So I think the world will come to an end amid the general applause from all the wits who believe that it is a joke. *Søren Kierkegaard*
- Most twentieth-century men, believers and unbelievers alike, contemplate the end of the world as they know it as the worst thing that could possibly happen. The earliest Christians did not share this assumption. On the contrary, they looked forward to the end of the world with the greatest eagerness, and they hardly ever opened their mouths in prayer without including a request that it should happen soon. *Henry McKeating*
- What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly. *Richard Bach*

Questions

What do we gain from all the images and symbols of the approaching End? How do we avoid appearing to be purveyors of doom? Do we just want to be vindicated in our prophetic interpretation, or are we looking beyond all that to the return of our loving Lord? How can we best share the great controversy perspective to give people hope in the troubled times ahead?

Bible summary

In Matthew 12:38–42 Jesus refuses to give a sign to “an evil and adulterous generation.” The people of Nineveh choose to repent (see Jonah 3:5–10). Revelation 18:4 is the call to leave Babylon. Daniel 5:1–31 recounts the story of Belshazzar’s feast. Revelation 16:12–19; details the angels pouring out their bowls of disaster. In 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23 Cyrus fulfills the prophecy given by Jeremiah. In Jonah 1:9 claims to be a follower of God, but is running away from him!.

Comment

The Biblical gives a wide range of images of the coming End. However the focus as given by Jesus is his return. We define ourselves as Adventists, not Existists. We are not primarily announcing the End of the World but the return of our Savior. So as we look forward to the end of the conflict, the conclusion to the great controversy, our central theme is the vindication of God and his nature and actions.

God sets about making the universe. As part of his vast creation he makes Planet Earth. Makes it the way *he* wants it to be. In perfect harmony, all nature in beautiful balance, a wonderful world that is *very good*.

But then comes the Fall—of both Lucifer and his angels, and Adam and Eve. No longer is God’s creation “very good.” So the great controversy begins, with all its terrible results. But inexorable it moves forward to its eventual end as God works his purposes out, and as we come to understand what the rebellion really means.

Do we really need all these signs of the approaching end? Forget all the time setting, and look forward to God's final resolution of the conflict in his vindication. The whole Bible points forward to the time when God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

The God who made the world is not about to go away and leave it to its fate. Yes, it's in a mess. Yes, we're destroying it. Yes, by our sinful selfishness we are proving that we are rebels in God's universe. But like a father watching his child about to smash a precious vase, God is not going to let us do it. Not completely. God promises: "Look! I'm going to create new heavens and a new earth." Isaiah 65:17. God will take this broken old Earth and remake it. We are told to look forward to the day when "the elements will melt in the heat." 2 Peter 3:12—because God will be molding and forming this world into his beautiful creation once more. "We are looking for new heavens and a new earth that God has promised where everything is good and right." 2 Peter 3:13.

Extra Comment

"A Brief History of the End of the World." Not the kind of headline you might expect to find in the secular press. Yet in its special Christmas issue (Dec. 18, 2004), British news and current affairs magazine *The Economist* devoted its cover story to such an analysis.

Of course, there are the obligatory references to the rapture theory and the "Left Behind" novel series, some comments on early Christian sects, and amusement at those who believe the end will be ushered in by UFOs.

And yes, we are in there too. "New apocalyptic creeds have even sprung from those sticky moments when the world has failed to end on schedule," says the article, going on to give a brief mention of the great disappointment and its aftermath. "Thus was born the Church of Seventh-day Adventists."

We could wish for a little more positive analysis of who we are and what we stand for... But the historical comments are accurate enough, if a little weird-sounding.

But behind the usual journalistic jibes is something more. A recognition that there is enormous appeal to the belief that this old, evil world will come to an end. And that the end is not termination, but a new beginning—the article even noting that the world apocalypse means to uncover or disclose: "The apocalyptic mind looks through the surface reality of the world and sees history's epic, true nature."

Even *The Economist* sees that our world is less than perfect, that humanity longs for something better, and each of us seeks something beyond this life. "Everyone needs redemption," the article asserts.

At the end, this is not a piece of mockery. It is a realization that despite the usual focus on stock markets and business deals and political agendas, we want more. As *The Economist* concludes: "Perhaps, deep down, there is something inside everyone which yearns for the New Jerusalem, a place where, as a beautiful bit of Revelation puts it: God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

What's the *good* news about the end of the world? Could it be that people are more willing to listen to what we've been preaching all these years than we usually think?

Ellen White Comments

The Lord is soon coming. Talk it, pray it, believe it. Make it a part of the life. {7T 237}

We are looking for the second coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We are not only to believe that the end of all things is at hand. We are to be filled with the advent spirit that when the Lord comes He may find us ready to meet Him, whether we are working in the field, or building a house, or preaching the Word; ready to say, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us" (Isaiah 25:9).—Letter 25, 1902, p. 7. ("To Those in Positions of Responsibility in the Southern Field," February 5, 1902.) {10MR 388}