

Focus on the Kingdom

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When the End Will Come: The Signs You Must See First! by Jesus and Paul

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In recent years, I have become more and more troubled over the deceived notions regarding Jesus' return due to the ubiquity of false prophecies on the internet, leading naive Christians far astray. I have a dear, faithful friend who frequently sends me links to these deceptive end-time visions and "words from the Lord." It bothers me, and it should bother you, that these false prophecies have little to do with the Truth in Scripture, yet good, God-fearing people believe them.

Both Jesus and Paul were quite clear in their explanation of *how* and *when* would be Jesus' second coming (his first coming being, of course, his birth). Let us review their sage words and what we can learn from them. I will break down each passage with some numbered points.

Jesus: Matthew 24

Matthew 24 records Jesus' teaching on the subject in answer to a question from his disciples. Verse 3 opens the story:

"As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him in private and asked, 'Please explain to us when these things [the destruction of the Temple] will happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and end of the age?'"¹

1. The wording of the disciples' question shows us that they believed the two events — the second coming and the "end of the age" — are synchronous, or at the very least, very close time-wise. A.D. 70 was absolutely not Jesus' return nor was 1914 nor any other year that has been predicted thus far because, even if it could be conceded that Jesus made an invisible return on one of those dates, the end of the age has not occurred. (Note: "end of the age" refers to the ending

of this "present evil age," this entire period since the Fall in which humankind has lived.)

2. The Greek word for the coming of Jesus (second time) is *parousia*. It refers to the splendid and visible arrival of the Messiah, certainly not an invisible coming which has already happened, or an invisible one in the future. Rev. 1:7 says "every eye will see him." So there will be no secret snatching away of the Church while people are sleeping. Nor will it be a return of Jesus that is separated by centuries or millennia from the End of the Age. As stated, the disciples expected Jesus' return to occur hand-in-hand with the end.

3. Other verses referring to Jesus' Second Coming in Matthew: 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20.

Matthew 24:4-13

Jesus did answer the disciples' question in the next section, Matthew 24:4-13:

Jesus replied, "Be careful that no one deceives you. Many will come claiming to speak on my authority, saying 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many people. You will be hearing about wars...Nations will rise up to fight against other nations...There will be famines and earthquakes in various places, but all these things are just the first of the coming birth pains. Then they will arrest you, persecute you, and kill you...Many false prophets will come and deceive many people...but whoever holds out to the end will be saved."

1. How could they "hold out to the end" if they have been snatched away into heaven, escaping the tribulations?

2. All these things are just the beginning! They've been going on for 2000 years! People in every millennium have thought they were living in the last days: the Crusades, through great plagues, two World Wars, etc. Even the disciples themselves thought that Jesus was going to establish his Kingdom imminently (right then).

3. Jesus warned way back then about false prophets who will deceive many. Not all prophets are true prophets sent by God, no matter what claims they make. Shall we believe Jesus or the modern-day prophets promoting their podcasts and books on the internet?

¹ The translation used for this article is *The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation*(OGF): onegodtranslation.com

Matthew 24:14-20

So then how can we know when we truly are in the *very last* last days? The ultimate last days that truly signal the end of this present evil age? The actual last few years before Jesus' return to set up his kingdom here on earth? Once again, Jesus provides the answer as he continues in his discourse recorded in Matthew 24:14-20:

"This Gospel about the Kingdom will be proclaimed around the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place the 'Abomination of Desolation' predicted by the prophet Daniel...run...how awful it will be...Pray that you do not have to flee in winter or on the Sabbath day."

1. So first of all, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God must be preached globally. We are now closer to that achievement than ever before in history. Advances in technology have been a great blessing to evangelization.

2. Second, the Abomination of Desolation must be set up "in the holy place," meaning in the Temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, that Temple must first be rebuilt. If the prophecy you are listening to gives a date prior to the existence of a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, it cannot be true.

3. If the prophet/prophecy you are listening to does not mention the Abomination of Desolation being set up in the "holy place" (i.e. the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem), then that prophet or prophecy is false! It is not agreeing with Jesus. Jesus cites from Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11. The Abomination of Desolation is a *person* "standing where **he** ought not to" (Mark 13:14).

4. Again, why would you be cautioned to pray about fleeing in the winter if you were already caught up in a rapture to heaven? Inquiring minds want to know!

Matthew 24:21-27

Jesus had further strong warnings about false prophets and the end of this evil age:

"For then there will be a great tribulation such as never was before and will never be again...Unless those days are cut short, nobody would be saved...False messiahs and false prophets will come along, and they will perform amazing signs and miracles in order to deceive even the chosen, if possible[!] Look, I have told you this before it happens. So if they tell you... 'Look, he is hidden away,' do not believe it. For the coming of the Son of Man will be like lightning flashing brightly."

1. I repeat: why would the time need to be cut short for the sake of the believers if they have already been caught up to safety in heaven?

2. Jesus clearly says not to believe in a secret or invisible second coming! In fact, he emphatically states that his coming will flash brightly like lightning!

Matthew 24:29-31

Now it gets really good and clear! "But immediately after [*When? Not years later, not millennia later, immediately!*] the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened...Then the sign [visible] of the Son of Man will appear in heaven...They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and brilliant majesty. With a trumpet blast he will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones."

1. Jesus' coming will be visible. It will be immediately after the Abomination of Desolation has been set up and the Great Tribulation has occurred, and then he comes! It will be visible and loud and earth-shaking! He will be accompanied by angels.

Paul: 2 Thessalonians 2

Now jump to Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians to see how he agreed with Jesus' words:

"In connection with the coming of our lord Jesus Messiah and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters: Do not be quickly shaken out of your senses or disturbed by any 'spiritual' utterance, any message or letter pretending to come from us, which suggests that the day of the Lord is immediately at hand or has already come. Do not let anyone deceive you by any means, because before that day comes there must first be the great rebellion, and the lawless man must appear, the one destined for destruction. He elevates himself over everything that is called God and all that people hold in reverence. He finally even installs himself in the temple of God, claiming to be God" (2 Thess. 2:1-4).

1. We have here a clear confirmation of Jesus' words to his disciples. There is an order to the events. People today cannot just have a dream or a vision or hear something that does not align with Scripture and think that their dream or vision replaces Jesus' and Paul's words! Jesus and Paul repeatedly warned us not to be deceived! Do not be led astray!

2. First, there must be a "Great Rebellion." As Jesus said, wars, and diseases, and all kinds of things will get worse and worse as more and more people turn their backs on God and His Truth. But that is only the beginning!

3. Second, the Temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt in order for the third event to occur.

4. Third, the Antichrist/Abomination of Desolation must set himself up (or be set up) in the holy place in the Temple of Jerusalem. This, of course, means that the Temple must be rebuilt before that! This has not happened yet.

5. Fourth, there will be a period of 7 years (per Daniel 9:27 and Revelation 12:6, 13:5) of treaty between “the Antichrist” and Israel. The last 3 ½ years of that 7-year period, referred to as the Great Tribulation, all living people will have to endure, believers and unbelievers, unless you can find a good hiding place.

Finally, after all that, only then, will Jesus’ appearing be on the horizon. He will destroy that wicked one/lawless one/Antichrist mentioned by both Jesus and Paul. We are assured of this in verses 8-9 of this same chapter 2 of Second Thessalonians:

“Then that lawless one will be revealed, the one whom the lord Jesus will destroy by the breath of his mouth and obliterate by the brilliance of his coming. That lawless one will stage his own ‘coming’ with Satan’s power to aid him. It will be accompanied by all kinds of miracles, signs, and amazing but deceptive displays of Satanic power.”

1. Read Paul’s words carefully: the Antichrist will set himself up “as god/God” in the Temple in Jerusalem (verse 4). Not in the USA or anywhere else.

2. The Antichrist and all his power will be utterly and completely destroyed (verse 8). That will be great cause for celebration.

1 Thessalonians 4

Now comes more great news and cause for rejoicing! In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul encouraged the believers with the following words:

“We do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep [in death], so that you will not grieve like others who have no hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we are also sure that God will [raise up the sleeping believers just as he did Lazarus.]...For we tell you this by the word of the lord: We who are alive, who remain [on the earth] until the coming of the lord, will not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep [in death]. For the lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, accompanied by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are [still] alive and remain [on earth, not raptured into heaven] will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the lord in the air [and then accompany/escort Jesus on his way down to the earth.] In this way we will be with the lord always [here on earth — eventually a cleansed, renewed, perfect earth]” (1 Thess. 4:13-17).

1. Resurrection Day is coming! We do not know when. But we can trust in Jesus’ promise. The dead will be raised. They will be brought back to life. They will not descend as spirits from heaven where they’ve been dancing around with the angels for dozens or hundreds

of years. That resurrection of the believers will be their first breath back into life; their first view of Jesus; their first step on to solid ground since they died. It will be our first chance to see one another after “all those years” — whether we were asleep in the dust of the earth or whether we are still alive when Jesus comes. What a day that will be!

1 Corinthians 15

But wait! That’s not all! Paul provided additional information about Jesus’ return, the end of the age and the resurrection in this passage from 1 Corinthians 15:19-26:

“If we have hoped in Messiah for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone! But now Messiah has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep in death. For since death came through a human being [Adam], the resurrection of the dead also comes through a human being [Jesus]. For just as in Adam all die, so in the Messiah all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Messiah first, then those who belong to Messiah at his coming. Later comes the end, when he will hand over the Kingdom to God who is the Father, after abolishing all rule, authority, and power...The last enemy to be abolished is death.”

1. There is always an order to God’s plans. The Grand Plan stated here is that Jesus was the first person to die and be resurrected to eternal life.

2. Then all other believers will be made alive again and given immortality at his second coming. “Will be” is a future tense. They are not already alive in heaven. They are currently asleep in the dust of the earth (Dan. 12:2), awaiting their resurrection which will take place in the future at the visible return of Messiah Jesus to the earth.

3. Jesus’ return to this earth inaugurates his reign as king for 1000 years right here on this earth while the post-Tribulation chaos is brought under control.

4. After that period of 1000 years (this number is found in Rev. 20), after having destroyed all evil powers, Messiah Jesus will hand over the kingdom to his Father and will himself then be subject to his Father, our God, Yahweh.

5. The last enemy to be destroyed will be death. Then peace, joy, health, etc. will become the norm forever and ever thereafter. And God (Yahweh) will dwell with us (see Rev. 21-22.)

It is my hope and prayer that this detailed outline, supported with verses from Jesus’ mouth and Paul’s pen, brings light and understanding to all who read this. I hope that questions are answered, doubts are dispelled, and you are no longer led astray by so-called prophets who teach anything different or who make

predictions about Jesus' return based on current world events that do not align with Scripture. *Selah* ✧

Eden: The Link Between Faith and Stewardship

by Barbara Buzzard

It is an often heard accusation that Christians do not care for this earth. “Let me just say it: care for the environment is not something that can be comfortably applauded in many Bible-believing church contexts. It is not a popular subject.”² Care and concern for the environment is generally thought to be a part of the liberal agenda. The specific charge often leveled against Christians is this: “They just don’t care.” And since most Christians believe that they will escape this earth and spend eternity in heaven, it would make sense that their view of gladly leaving it behind would shape their attitude toward it. It’s almost a “to hell with the earth” approach

But we who firmly believe that God has promised us this earth — the land — could not be guilty of the same dismissive attitude. Or could we? Let’s see.

This is not a piece about gardening, even though I am an unapologetic lover of God’s incredible Creation. (I wouldn’t do that to you!) However, it is a look at how faith either does or does not influence our environmental stewardship. Michael Abbaté’s wonderful book, *Gardening Eden: How Creation Care Will Change Your Faith, Your Life, and Our World*, brings together the physical and the spiritual, and questions the great divide that we *think* is there. “People of faith are rarely recognized for leading the way in promoting environmental moderation, protection, or restoration. Many nonbelieving friends and colleagues have rightly pointed this out to me as they ask, ‘Why aren’t Christians more involved in environmental issues?’”³

I am not a “tree hugger.” I am a radical in pursuit of Truth but I have no political agenda. Since all Truth is God’s Truth and since our ancestors came *from* Eden and we are destined *for* Eden, let us have a look at it. Do we not have a calling to care for the earth? Is it not a sacred task? We know that God rejoiced in all that He made.⁴ And we could therefore deduce that He would want to preserve it.

The preservation of this earth and not the trashing of it is basic in our job description.⁵ Is it only the chorus which speaks of “standing on holy ground” or should it be an attitude — bound up with our identity as children of God? Our identity is surely connected to the purpose of our Creator which is to find a people obedient to His Gospel about the Kingdom and bless them unbelievably.

“Heaven the way Scripture describes it — a bright, vibrant, and physical New Earth.”⁶

“The truth is, in our seminaries, churches, and families, we have given amazingly little attention to the place where we will live forever with Christ and his people — the New Earth.”⁷

“Oh, I see,” said a friend. “It will be heaven on earth.”

Something Is Wrong Here

“It’s a great irony...Secular humanism doesn’t offer a higher rationale for its convictions, and people of faith recognize no moral imperative to protect the planet. It appears something is rather wrong here.”⁸

“The Christian worldview holds that humans have special, unparalleled significance in the universe. From this perspective, it matters if humans disappear from the earth, and it would be a great tragedy for us to destroy ourselves by destroying our world.”⁹

Dare we ignore God’s everlasting “covenant between Me and the earth”?¹⁰ Dare we ignore creation care?

“People of faith claim to know the Artist but lack any compunction for protecting the *artwork*. Why have God’s followers not been defending this *masterpiece* from degradation?”¹¹

Root of the Problem?

What would hinder us from taking the care of our world that its Creator would expect and be pleased with? First would be the idea that you will leave the earth by going to heaven and therefore the earth would be of little consequence. Second, I believe, would be the false but somewhat popular idea that “everything is going to burn.” Or to put it in the vernacular, “Everything is going to burn, baby!” Or “the planet is going to be destroyed anyway.” Where did this idea come from? Some translations are misleading in 2 Peter 3:10: “The earth and its works will be *burned up*.” Let’s examine this verse which describes the Day of the Lord. The ESV and others have “the earth and the

² Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Foreword

³ Michael Abbaté, *Gardening Eden*, 2009, p. 19

⁴ Ps. 24:1

⁵ Gen. 1 and 2

⁶ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Gardening Eden*, p. 20

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21

¹⁰ Gen. 9:13

¹¹ *Gardening Eden*, p. 22

works that are done on it will be **exposed**.” Note: “exposed,” not “burned up.” The NET reads: “The earth and every deed done on it will be **laid bare**” (NRSV and others: “disclosed”). Psalm 18:15b is similar: “The foundations of the earth were **laid bare**.”

God established the earth and its myriad complexities. He is not about to destroy it. God is about restoration, transformation, rehabilitation, renewal. As was pointed out by a diligent Bible student, the verse we most often turn to for the promise of restoration is Acts 3:2-1, that is, Acts 3:21: The Messiah “must remain in heaven until the time for the restoration of all things, which God promised from long ago through His holy prophets.” God’s plan from the beginning will not fail. He does not have to move it to heaven. He does not have to work with plan B. Paradise lost will be followed by paradise regained.¹² In store for us is The Great Reversal!

And think of this: when Abraham comes to life in the resurrection, there will be no need for him to ask God why He burned up his (Abraham’s) promised inheritance!

“The heavens belong to the LORD, but he has given the earth to all humanity” (Ps. 115:16). Why is this verse not known, taught, understood and used as basic? The earth is on loan to us, rather like the breath of life (which returns to God who gave it, Ecc. 12:7). To miss this is to be at sea, to be at a loss as to where to put your stake in and so be grounded by Truth.

Theology of the Earth

The two following paradigms are representative of most Christian views: 1) This world is a gift from God and therefore we must do our best to preserve it and protect it from harm. 2) This planet is a tool, only useful for meeting temporary needs, and destined to be done away with in favor of a cosmic, heavenly home.¹³ Our viewpoint necessitates a theological decision as to God’s Plan and Purpose; it necessitates a *theology of the earth*.

“There is a danger of sometimes losing our faith and being left with only its application. The New Testament gospels reveal how the Jewish Pharisees were guilty of this. They had emphasized personal works and the obedience to their society’s rules so much that their rules eventually became what they believed. After a century or so of teaching people to do things, or not to do things, the reasons for the

¹² Although this is the title of a Jehovah’s Witness publication, the Paradise described there does not bear true witness to the Scriptures, in my opinion.

¹³ “How to Live Like a Conditionalist,” *From Death to Life*

¹⁴ Ibid.

commands were lost, and there was nothing left but the commands.”¹⁴

Oh, How I Love This One!

“After he created the world, all the living things, and man, God invented *landscape architecture*. He planted a special, protected garden and added all sorts of beautiful trees and a river to water it. It was probably a purely delightful place, lacking nothing but a gardener.”¹⁵

In teaching junior Master Gardeners, I find that having them plant a garden answers the question as to what a miracle is, far better than any definition I could give. And it teaches them something that I simply cannot. When as the teacher, one feels their joy at harvesting something — or even just by working in the earth, one senses what it feels like for God to watch our success. He derives pleasure from our successes.¹⁶

“While the world was still pure and sinless, there was meaningful work to be done in this special garden to ensure its health. *Gardening Eden was not Adam’s punishment; it was his purpose.*”¹⁷ And we follow the model of our Father and our brother: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.”¹⁸ The entire planet is our garden. An uninterested Christian? I don’t think so!

And speaking of that future Kingdom for which we all pray by saying The Lord’s Prayer, God says: “And when I bring you back, people will say, ‘This godforsaken land is now like Eden’s garden!’” (Ezek. 36:35).

It’s About Restoration!

We are all familiar with the parables about stewardship, and so just to leave them there on the page and not to employ them is dangerous for us. We must face our positions as corporate stewards of this planet and ask ourselves how we are doing. God is so unbelievably generous to us. “God gives us this universe freely, wanting us to discover the joys of responsible stewardship, of moderation, and the freedom that comes with self-discipline and caring for a flock, of not squandering resources. And by doing these things, God tells us, we’ll better understand and appreciate Him. He alone knows the deep joy and satisfaction that will be ours when He catches us fulfilling our calling and says to us, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’”¹⁹ *And so it is with reverence*

¹⁵ *Gardening Eden*, p. 38

¹⁶ Instead of saying I am a Master Gardener, I prefer to say that I work in my Master’s Garden.

¹⁷ *Gardening Eden*, p. 39

¹⁸ John 15:1

¹⁹ *Gardening Eden*, p. 41

rather than abandon that we must look upon and treat God's creation.²⁰

"We're told that a time is coming when God will restore *everything*. This is an inclusive promise. It encompasses far more than God merely restoring disembodied people to fellowship in a spirit realm...It is God restoring mankind to what we once were, what he designed us to be — fully embodied, righteous beings. And restoring the entire physical universe to what it once was..."

"God will restore everything *on Earth*. The prophets are never concerned about some far-off realm of disembodied spirits. They are concerned about the land, the inheritance, the city of Jerusalem, and the earth they walk on. Messiah will come from Heaven to Earth, not take us away from Earth to Heaven, but to restore Earth to what he intended so he can live with us here forever."²¹

It's about renewal, not elimination.

Loving Your Neighbor?!

"How can you love your neighbor if you don't know...how to keep your filth out of his water supply and your poison out of his air?...How can you be a [good] neighbor without applying principle — without bringing virtue to a practical issue? How will you practice virtue without skill?"²² And so, as with most things in life — it's a matter of knowledge combined with application and performance.

What does God say about environmental stewardship? He is all too clear: He will destroy those who destroy the earth (Rev. 11:18b). After all, it is His — on loan to us, and requiring looking after. And since what He made was good and since He loves the world He created, so must we (Ps. 145:17).

"The more I study the vast wonders of this natural interlocking system, the more I'm amazed by God. He didn't simply call for casting individual species and create separate environments for them all. He scripted an incredible living drama of interaction, dependence, and interdependence upon interdependence. **It is the performance of this creation in motion that is so ridiculously awesome.**"²³

²⁰ I purposely have not given a set of rules that we should follow so as to respect God's Good Earth. Should we not employ the physician's oath (sorely violated) to first do no harm? Even though I have a huge battle with weeds, I refuse to use Roundup or any product containing glyphosate, as it has been shown to cause cancer (and if not to me — what about my neighbor?). We have to be acutely aware of the interactions of toxins and chemicals which can

Moved by Beauty

Why are we moved by beauty? Knowing that we are unique in this among all God's creation ought to make us stop and think. What is the *point* of beauty, either of the eye or of the ear? Not necessary, to be sure, but the benefits are monumental. Our reaction to beauty is a quality given from the One in whose image we are made and we share this with Him. Our appreciation of beauty is a gift from a Father who also appreciates it.

Science and psychology together make a connection between health and nature. The restorative power of God's creation is undeniable; the sheer power of the outdoors to refresh and inspire, to instill peace and calm are well attested facts. The therapeutic power of the outdoors is witnessed to by both medicine and theology. Many would agree that they go outdoors to have their senses put in order. Is it just an accident that as you nourish the soil, the soil nourishes you?

And I would add that research has shown that there is a bacteria (a good one) in the soil which stimulates our feel-good hormones. That bacteria is also said to increase learning ability.

And so the pay-off for gardeners is out of proportion to anything they might put into it. And the creation of beauty is the crowning glory, that delight which we share with our Father in harmony.

"So if we did nothing else in our Christian view of nature than to save and enjoy beauty, it would be of value, and worthwhile...When we have learned this — the Christian view of nature — then there can be a real ecology; beauty will flow, psychological freedom will come, and the world will cease to be turned into a desert."²⁴

In the Kingdom "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy" (Isa. 35:1-2). It has been suggested that people from a planet without flowers would think we must be mad with joy the whole time to have such things around us. As Einstein reportedly said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is."

poison the land. Secondly, an often employed saying among Christians is that when we use/rent a space, we have a responsibility to leave it in a better condition than we found it.

²¹ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, p. 90

²² Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*

²³ *Gardening Eden*, p. 31

²⁴ Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*

Case in Point

Hundreds of millions of butterflies migrate each year to the mountains of central Mexico, some traveling over two thousand miles. How, Abbaté asks, does a creature barely an inch and a half long, weighing virtually nothing, travel twenty-five to one hundred miles a day? Their arrival in Mexico creates a staggeringly beautiful sight as they cover the pine trees there so densely that the trunks, branches and needles of the trees cannot be seen. Their movements make the trees appear like twinkling gold, a sight so majestic that it is breath-taking.²⁵ And if it is God's Plan that this scenario takes place, shouldn't we do our part to ensure that this fragile beauty continues?

Moved by Understanding and Appreciation

The Bible speaks about trees more than any other living thing other than humans.²⁶ The word "tree" or "trees" is found 311 times in Scripture. It seems that God has a very great fondness for trees since they are woven into the Scriptures from one end to the other. Every significant event in the Bible is marked by a tree or its parts — branches, fruit and seed. There is a tree featured on the first page of Genesis, the first Psalm, the first page of the New Testament, and the last page of Revelation.²⁷ In fact, the tree of life begins and ends the Bible. Our Rabbi Jesus is the true vine, the shoot or descendant of David. We Gentiles are that wild olive tree grafted in. And we are to be like trees, firmly planted, firmly rooted, bearing fruit, and never withering.

Understanding the mechanics of trees offers us a glimpse of the world that many miss. Missing the wonder means missing much about the nature of God and His love for us. In fact, you might wonder how it is that you have read the Bible your entire life and missed so many insights and treasures. The more one knows, the more one finds he doesn't know. Appreciation and understanding help bridge the gap between faith and environmentalism. Nature is not a self-acting instrument. We must be aware of the connection between heaven and earth so that we might participate in God's Plan.

In one class on trees the professor informed us that there is such a vast amount of knowledge that can be ascertained from "reading" a tree's rings²⁸ that we could even discern what spring was like in the year Jesus was born in Bethlehem!

No stone was left unturned in the planning of the universe by its great Designer/Creator. For us, it's just a matter of keeping up our piece of the planet.

"By My great power I have made the earth and all its people and every animal. I can give these things of Mine to anyone I choose" (Jer. 27:5).

We must *tread carefully upon the earth* out of respect for its Designer, Creator and Sustainer. ✧

Comments

• "It was good to hear and learn that the literature ministry of yours has been going so well in recent months, and that the Lord is blessing your efforts and labor of love. We can defend with confidence the genuine biblical monotheism against the Quranic God of Islamic religion; I see how the Trinitarians struggle to defend Christianity's self-inflicted wound (the Trinity). Thank God, I lent a few copies of your books to our likeminded friends, before land fall of the super-typhoon in our area last year. What we're mostly feeling right now is thankfulness that we came through safely through God's mercy (Acts 27:22). Nobody's been hurt. 'I am able to do all things through the one who empowers me' (Phil. 4:13). That's the only way to get through this. Pray that the Lord provides strength and encouragement in these troubled days." — *Philippines*

• "For a long time, I have been deeply studying the Holy Scriptures and trying to place the teachings of Jesus Christ at the center of my life. However, I find myself in a delicate and unique situation regarding my faith journey. My beliefs are firmly rooted in the Biblical Unitarian perspective and the redemptive role of Jesus Christ as the Savior. Having experienced highly structured religious organizations, I have found that dogmatic pressure and 'rehearsed' forms of faith have become spiritually exhausting for me." — *Turkey*

"Jerusalem is important in God's future plans. Luke 21:20-24 speaks of a severe destruction of Jerusalem with long-lasting negative consequences for Israel. But the time of Gentile domination of Israel and Jerusalem is temporary. A day is coming when Jerusalem will be restored and established as the capital city of God's earthly kingdom. 'The implication,' as Buzzard notes, 'is that Jerusalem, as capital of the Messiah's kingdom, will not remain under Gentile control indefinitely...the time for Jerusalem's redemption will have arrived.'"

— Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God*, 2017, p. 388-389

²⁵ *Gardening Eden*.

²⁶ And, of course, with the exception of God Himself.

²⁷ Matthew Sleeth, *Reforesting Faith*.

²⁸ Known as the hidden language of trees.