

## “THE EARTH ABIDETH FOR EVER”

*“One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.” (Eccl. 1:4)*

Some religious groups are of the opinion that this passage in Eccl. 1:4 confirms their belief that this earth will not be destroyed but will instead simply be cleansed and made ready for re-habitation at the end of time. Seeing that this is not in harmony with other passages, what does “for ever” mean in this verse?

As with all understanding of Scripture, this verse is to be understood in the context in which it is written. This simply means that a verse must not be taken from its setting. The matter under consideration is the vanity of man, and verse 3 places the setting as “*under the sun.*” What lies under the sun? The earth, life as we now know it, time (as opposed to eternity), and all which relates to a physical, mortal existence. The term “*under the sun*” is found 34 times in this book, and in each use refers to the time now present while the sun continues to shine upon our material earth.

In contrast to the lives of men which continue but for one generation at a time, verse 4 states that “*the earth abideth for ever.*” The words “for ever” are to be understood in the contrasting sense that, while men live only one generation at a time, the earth will continue to exist until the end of time.

The same idea is expressed regarding the term “for ever” as it was used to refer to:

1. The genealogical line of David. “*Howbeit the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant He had made with David, and as He promised to give a light to him and to his sons FOR EVER*” (2 Chron. 21:7). But David’s line HAS ceased; it did not continue for ever.

2. Priesthood of the sons of Levi. “*For the Lord thy God hath chosen out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons FOR EVER*” (Deut. 18:5). But the Levitical line HAS ceased; it did not continue for ever. In fact, Hebrews 7:11-12 states, “*What further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchisedec, and*

*not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood BEING CHANGED, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."*

3. Achish and David. Achish said of David, *"He shall be my servant for ever"* (1 Sam. 27:12). But two chapters later Achish said to David, *"Depart. So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines"* (1 Sam. 29:10-11). David did not continue with Achish; he did not continue for ever.

It should be understood, then, that *"for ever"* refers to the duration of that which is under consideration and not to a limitless eternity. If this were not so, then we would have Scripture clashing with Scripture and being absolutely meaningless.

Note these plain, simple, and easy to be understood words of 2 Peter 3:10-12, *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?"*

Note further that in the next verse (13), Peter gives great hope in saying, *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for a NEW heaven and a NEW earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."* The present earth and its related heaven will have ceased to exist, and this beautiful verse simply informs us that a new and wonderful state of being, beyond the destruction of this present system, will be ours to enjoy.

### **Statements of Other Commentators**

Matthew Henry (1662-1714) says of this verse, *"It is well for mankind in general that the earth endures to the end of time, when it and all the works in it shall be burnt up."*

Adam Clarke (1762-1832) wrote of this verse, *"Man succeed each other in unceasing generations: but the earth is still the same; it undergoes no change that leads to melioration or greater perfection. And it will continue the same ... during the whole course of time; till the end of all things arrive."*

E.M.Zerr, commentator of the past century wrote, "The preceeding verse sets forth the idea that the earth is to be destroyed, but in this it abideth *for ever*. The explanation is in the full meaning of the term *for ever*. The literal definition of it is "age-lasting." In any place where the term is authorized at all this definition will be correct. However, the specific extent of the thing or idea to which it is applied must be determined by the nature of that thing itself. In the present verse the writer speaks of the generations of men, that they come and go. In contrast with this, the earth remains after a generation of men has gone and another has come to take its place. In other words, as long as the age lasts in which the generations of men are produced one after another, just that long will the earth abide."

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## THE PAST

We are about to begin a new year. For many this is a time of reflection as well as a time to think of the future. But how should we view the past as Christians? How should we look at the life we lived in [2003]? Here are three verses that can help us.

1. John 9:62, *"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*

All sinful habits (or habitual sins) need to be left behind. We should strive to break any habits that have hindered our growth in the past that continue to plague us. Let's make every effort to do this: avoid putting ourselves in the path of temptation, pray for strength, study in the Lord about our area of weakness, ask for the prayers of others, etc. We can break habits == He will help us (Phil. 4:13).

2. Phil. 3:13-14, *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

Paul did many, many, MANY things to serve the Lord. Yet, his words in this verse show us that he planned to keep working. We

should follow his example - even if we did much in [2003] in service to Him, we should not take confidence in this. Remember, Titus 3:5; Gal. 2:16, and Eph. 2:8-9 tell us that we are not saved by our works, but James 2 shows us that faith without works is dead. In other words, we don't "earn" our salvation by our works, but still need to be busy for the Lord. Paul kept the prize of Heaven as his goal at all times and did all that he could to make sure he would receive it. Let's do the same.

3. Heb. 5:14, *"But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."*

To me, this verse ties the principles of the first two verses together well. We need to put sin behind us and to not take confidence in our past righteousness, but we don't necessarily need to forget the past. This verse in Hebrews describes some who by their experiences had grown to be able to handle the "strong meat" of the Word. It was *"by reason of use"* that they became able *"to discern both good and evil."*

In the same way, each trial we face can help us to become stronger - every triumph, and even every fall. For this to happen, we need to use our past as a tool. A common saying is "hindsight is 20/20." If we have fallen in the past, let's use what we know about ourselves and how we fell, and avoid that situation. If we were able to overcome a temptation in the past, then let's remember how we avoided the sin before, and not fall when the temptation presents itself in the future.

With the coming of the New Year, many make "New Year's Resolutions" and future plans. Let's be sure when we make these goals, we consider our past.

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## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. In what province were the seven churches John wrote about in the first three chapters of Revelation?
2. Did God promise to eliminate harmful beasts from the Promised Land?

3. What destroyed the house built upon the sands?
4. On what did Habakkuk record his vision?
5. What happened when King Uzziah did the forbidden act of burning incense before the Lord?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. Who reigned on the throne of Judah in King Josiah's place? JEHOAHAZ (2 Chr. 36:1)
2. Where did Abraham serve food to the three men that appeared to him in Genesis 18? UNDER A TREE (Gen. 18:8)
3. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which son wanted his inheritance? THE YOUNGER (Luke 15:12)
4. From what can neither height nor depth separate us? THE LOVE OF GOD THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS (Rom. 8:39)
5. What does Zephaniah say the Lord must purify before the people can call on His name? THEIR LIPS (Zech. 3:9)