

The Final Trip Around the Sun

By Daryl Wingerd



Well, it's the new year. We made it around the sun again. The inhabitants of Earth make the full circuit once every year—365.25 days, or 365 days and 6 hours (which explains why we observe Leap Year and add a day every four years). If you are 45 years old, you have made 45 trips around the sun.

The Bible tells us that there will be a final trip around the sun for the inhabitants of Earth. At

some point, the measurement of time, as we know it, will cease since it will be swallowed up by eternity. Though no one knows when that last circuit around the sun will take place, Jesus assures us that it will be "soon" (Rev. 22:20). He is referring to his return, of course, and it is at that very moment that all things will change — forever.

Consider what happens when Jesus returns — when the tracking of years by the measure of Earth's circling the sun ceases:

The Resurrection of the Dead

The majority of the people who have lived on Earth will have died. At Jesus' return, all of them will be resurrected from the dead. Those who were his true followers (including those who are still alive when he returns) will be given new, incorruptible bodies that they will enjoy for all of eternity — no more pain, no more disease, no more death, no more sin (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:42-55; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The Final Judgment

Even the unbelieving dead will be resurrected — to face the judgment of God according to their deeds (John 5:27-29; Rev. 20:11-15; Rom. 2:6-11; 1 Pet. 1:14-19). Nothing will be overlooked, and every evil deed will be justly punished. Even the good things that should have been done but weren't will be charged against the unbeliever and punished in what Jesus calls "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46).

Believers will stand at the judgment too, but they won't face punishment. This isn't because they were perfect in their conduct, but because Jesus paid the full penalty for their sins on the cross. The judgment will also show that their faith in Christ motivated them to conduct themselves in ways that set them apart from the rest of the world. They demonstrated their

faith and love by obeying Jesus' commands (John 14:15). As Paul says in Romans 2:7, they are those who "by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality." Unbelievers, on the other hand, are those "who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness" (Rom. 2:8).

The Destruction of the First Creation

Peter assures us that "the heavens and the earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly . . . 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" (2 Pet. 3:7, 10). This future event leads to Peter's next admonition to his believing readers: "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness!" Does it make any sense whatsoever to set your affections on the sinful pleasures and riches and material goods of this world — things that will eventually either be punished everlasting or destroyed by fire?

The New Creation

For believers, the destruction of the first creation will be superseded by God's new creation. As Peter writes, "according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (3:13). For believers, "we are waiting for" indicates the center of our affection. Rather than striving after riches or worldly goods, rather than pursuing the temporary satisfaction of sinful pleasures, we are waiting for what God has in store for us after the earth ceases to circle the sun. As Jesus put it, we are storing up treasure in heaven rather than on earth, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

Eternal Fellowship with God

Following the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the destruction of the first creation, and the establishment of the new creation, believers will enjoy everlasting fellowship with God. Note in Revelation 21 the emphasis on the words "with man" and "with them" in John's description of what he heard: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is *with man*. He will dwell *with them*, and they will be his people, and God himself will be *with them* as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor dying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away'" (vv. 3-4). Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But will this be your reality when the earth stops circling the sun?

Round, and round, and round it goes. When it will stop, nobody knows.