

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

By Merv Buckmaster

Introduction

Expectations arise when a lack of something has been recognised and there follows a hope that the lack will be overcome.

Expectations arise when it is recognised that a promise has not been fulfilled.

Why Expectations?

When Solomon had become king of Israel and made burnt offerings to God, Yahweh said unto him, *"Ask what shall I give thee"*. Solomon replied, *"Give me now wisdom and knowledge"* (2 Chronicles 1:6–10). He acknowledged that his request had been granted, and wrote *"... and I gave my heart to search and seek out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven ... and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem"* (Ecclesiastes 1:13,16).

He discerned that in this world there is only a little satisfaction to be had in *"... whatever thy hand findeth to do"* (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Solomon, in his wisdom, could see this truth because he knew that death ended all of man's endeavours. He *"... returned [looked back] and saw under the sun, that the race is not [always] to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all"* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). He concluded from these wide-ranging observations that *"... all is vanity and vexation of spirit"* (Ecclesiastes 1:14).

Without this wisdom and knowledge men have tried to win races, tried to win battles, tried to gain advantage through being wise, tried to become rich by understanding social forces, and tried to gain favour by being smart.

And because they observe that some races and some battles can be won, that some people can become rich or powerful, they are motivated by hope that they can win status or power or riches, and build that hope into great expectations.

It is part of human nature to have expectations.

Although he could see, in his wisdom, that everyone is subject to time and chance, Solomon could not avoid the conclusion “... *that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to [join, NIV] the dead*” (Ecclesiastes 9:3).

Solomon’s father, King David, praised God that he had crowned man with glory and honour (Psalm 8:5), but Solomon’s contrasting conclusion is restated eloquently by Thomas Gray in his elegy that, “The paths of glory lead but to the grave”.

Instead of taking the advice of Solomon to “*Fear God and keep his commandments*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13), men’s great expectations lead to the idea that “... *a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink and to be merry*” (Ecclesiastes 8:15). Thus, if we should seek wisdom as Solomon did, we would be wise to accept his realisation that great expectations are all vanity (worthlessness) and vexation of spirit (anxious frustration).

However, Solomon’s observations were based upon all things that he could see under the sun. We are better placed than he to judge all those things because we are able to add to that ancient wisdom elements that God has revealed of his plans that are to take place on earth and in heaven.

While men may have great expectations, they are earthly expectations, which are ideas without a future. And as God’s thoughts and ways are higher than our thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:9), he has challenged us to lift ours from the earthly to the heavenly. Thus, our expectations change from vanity and vexation of spirit to great expectations, which are indications of a wonderful future because they are based on his promises, which cannot fail.

Those promises are of a new heavens and a new earth which, when completed, will last forever. The prospect of such future events has been considered in the

presentation TWO PROMISES. From the thoughts expressed there it would be natural, and perhaps justifiable, for us to imagine those things that we would like to be included in a new, perfect order of creation, and to expect those imaginings to be granted.

However, we have been taught that all things that were written in scripture are for us to learn (Romans 15:4), to use as God's guide to our understanding, and to set the standard for that learning.

Thus, it is justifiable, instead, for us to look in the written word for those things that will be included in that new order, and that can therefore be taken as a firm basis for our great expectations.

The Earth

Since God has given the earth to the children of men (Psalm 115:16), and since the earth is ravaged by floods, earthquakes, wildfires and storms, the renewing of the earth is most important, so that nothing will hurt nor destroy when the kingdom age, with its new heavens, that is its new ruling powers, begins.

God promised to Noah that no flood will again destroy all life (Genesis 9:11), and told him that the rainbow *"...is the token of the promise which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations"* (Genesis 9:12).

And for God to be just, it could be expected that his promise about floods will also apply to earthquakes, wildfires and storms.

With respect to the earth, among prophecies concerning the kingdom, there are passages which may be taken literally. For example:

"The wilderness and the solitary place will be glad ... the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1).

And *"... for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert; And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water"* (Isaiah 35:6–7).

The reality of this promise of renewal has been proven by the application of man's understanding of geology and horticulture to produce vast crops of fruit and grains, grown in arid lands, to feed an increasing population. Since this productivity has not been of benefit to many nations, a redress of the imbalance is one of our great expectations.

There are other prophecies about the earth.

For example, Job 28:9–11 *"He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing. He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light."*

And Psalm 46:2 *"Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea"*.

And the latter part of Ezekiel 38:20 *"... and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground."*

In Luke 3:5 the prophecy in Isaiah 40:4 is referred to as being preached by John the Baptist; *"Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth."*

Also *"... everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow ..."* (Habakkuk 3:6).

Plus, *"... every island fled away, and the mountains were not found"* (Revelation 16:20).

It could be expected that the ideas apparently suggested in the above quotations could be applied to the great mountain ranges of earth with their inhospitable snow-bound peaks. However, it is inappropriate to take those verses out of their contexts, all of which have symbolic relevance to the new heavens and earth, since mountains and hills represent governmental arrangements among the people.

In contrast to the promises of the restoration of the deserts, I am unaware of any specific indication of the future of the dangerous realms of ice and snow, whether in the mountains or at the poles.

Thus, the contexts of these references indicate that they are to be understood in a figurative, not literal, sense; although it would be interesting to know how God will make places, such as the physical mountain ranges, safe for habitation.

Perhaps, when the kingdom is handed back to God (1 Corinthians 15:24) the number of those who have been granted eternal life will be accommodated safely in the fertile valleys between the mountains, and on the well-watered deserts, so that the mountains will remain, with their scenic grandeur as a reminder of God's creative power.

And perhaps those people will choose to stay in the safe places, although the mountains could be explored by people given divine protection from the dangers, as Jonah was protected in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 1:17), and as the three Israelites were protected in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace (Daniel chapter three).

However, there can be no uncertainty about the safety aspect of the following verses; *"And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"* (Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3).

Spears and, by implication, all weapons of war, will be abolished. We can expect nothing less than peace on earth, which will prevail under Jesus' rule because he is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

The People

Because of Adam's disobedience every person is subject to death. Some will die by famine, or war or illness or old age, and while the manner of their dying has no significance, all will be subject to death, which is the state of non-existence.

Once the earth has been made a perfect place for human habitation (Psalm 104:30), and in accordance with the reconstitution of all things mentioned by Peter (Acts 3:21), and then because of the promise that because of Jesus' sacrifice all will be made alive, it may be expected that Jesus' words will come into effect; *"... for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth ..."* (John 5:28–29).

Also, *"... and the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them"* (Revelation 20:13). Although death is a state of non-existence, all these words seem to have a literal rather than symbolic meaning. Every person will be raised from death.

This will be the resurrection.

God has proved that he can return people from that state of death by raising Jesus (Acts 17:31).

The verses in John 5 show that there will be two stages of the resurrection; firstly for some to life, and secondly for some to judgement. Everyone will be judged according to their works (Revelation 20:12–13), and the verse in Acts 17 states the Jesus will judge the world in righteousness.

In the past, noble men have praised the virtues of justice. When Jesus reigns, we can expect that he will deliver perfect justice.

Those who will be raised in that first stage will be the few who have been chosen by God when he shall take out a people for his name (Acts 15:14). They are identified by Paul as *"children of God"* (Romans 8:14–16) and described as part of the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4–6). Thus, they will be joint-heirs with Jesus, as explained by Paul, and in his explanation he includes the point that creation is waiting in expectation *"... for the manifestation of the sons of God ..."* at the first resurrection (Romans 8:12–17).

Something of the nature of the resurrection is explained by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Some will be raised as spirit beings (verse 44), some will be raised as human beings (also verse 44). Since there is a difference between spirit beings and human beings, there is also a difference between spirit bodies and human bodies, although we know only what human bodies can be like.

Well may we marvel at this, especially at the conclusion that some human beings will be raised as spirit beings (verse 49).

They will be raised to eternal life (John 10:28), in glory and power (verse 43), which are all aspects of the new life which are beyond human comprehension, but are aspects of our great expectations. They will be given a complete knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

Those in the second resurrection can expect to be given a complete knowledge of the truth also, and, in accord with God's perfect justice, they will have the opportunity to choose the offer of life made through the terms of the New Covenant, which can be expected to continue to rule God's dispensation with the human race. Those who will be raised as children, and any raised as old men, will be allowed time to grow and learn (Isaiah 65:20).

God promised natural Israel that *"... my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD ..."* (Isaiah 54:10). He had proclaimed to them that *"... my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished"* (Isaiah 51:6), therefore we can expect that his promise to natural Israel is also valid as a promise to spiritual Israel, an expectation which is securely founded in the New Covenant.

With respect to those who are resurrected as human beings, one aspect is prophesied by Job, who acknowledged that God is loving and gracious to sinful man, going as far as to *"Deliver him from going down to the pit [for] I have found a ransom [or atonement]. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth"* (Job 33:24). Eternal youth will please God and his people on earth.

The Kingdom

Thus we come from the human aspects to the more earthly aspects of the resurrection. It is to be expected that the following changes described by the prophets will come into force during the kingdom age. And probably not all at once because God is a god of order (Isaiah 9:7), and will have all things *"... done decently and in order"* (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Those who know nothing of the extensiveness of God's plan in all its aspects will need much time to learn of them, perhaps gaining a complete knowledge while regaining the days of their youth, with a mental awareness and a bodily freshness better than their first youthfulness.

The prophecy in Isaiah is expanded simply and briefly, starting with *"Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped"*, which are promises that may be applied in both a literal and spiritual sense (Isaiah 35:4–6).

".... and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isaiah 35:6) is another promise more consistent with physical reality. This promise gives us the basis to expect that everyone will be able to sing, if they choose to sing, for it would be unjust for anyone to be denied such an ability to express joyous worship. Everyone will be able to respond to king David's call *"O let the nations be glad and sing for joy"* (Psalm 67:4) and *"Sing unto God, sing praises to his name"* (Psalm 68:4).

The people of earth will be enchanted by singing; by the sound of music.

From either aspect these promises justify great expectations for the time when they come to pass. We know that God has given us five physical senses, and we may expect that he will be acknowledged with the credit for the gift of these enriching human faculties.

However, there is a cautionary challenge for our search to find prophecies and promises for great expectations, and to know the difference between the physical and the symbolic. God's promise to make all things new is included in a book of prophetic symbolism (Revelation chapter 21), but it seems to be applicable to the physical earth because we are able to see the great need for the earth to be restored to conditions which were created in the garden of Eden.

The promise of renewal is preceded by *"And 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"* (Revelation 21:4).

To any human being, these words can have only a literal meaning.

"...neither shall there be any more pain" ...

"... nothing shall hurt ... in all my holy kingdom, saith the LORD."

There is great relief to know that blessings from these promises can be added to our great expectations.

They are an answer to king David's plea; *"LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us"* (Psalm 4:6).

Furthermore, something of the nature of the kingdom is described in Isaiah. *"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse ... and the spirit of the LORD will rest upon him ... and righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."*

"And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy kingdom" (Isaiah 11:1-9).

'The rod out of the stem of Jesse' identifies Jesus as the one who will have the spirit of the LORD, which was given to him at his baptism (Matthew 3:13–17), and given without measure (John 3:34).

He will judge in righteousness (Isaiah 11:4) and with the faithfulness of God (Psalm 89).

The way in which the animals are described as living together implies that there will be no animosity among them, but that they will be living in peace and harmony.

If the lion will be eating straw, will all the carnivorous animals become herbivores?

If the asp will be harmless to the child, will there be no venomous reptiles?

Since with God there is no variableness (James 1:17), it could be expected that what will apply to the lion will apply to all carnivores; and that the asp represents all reptiles.

Surely nowhere else in scripture could there be better support for great expectations.

Nothing will hurt nor destroy in all God's holy kingdom.

All people will be given a pure language (Zephaniah 3:9), as was discussed in the presentation ANOTHER PROMISE, in which a pure language was considered to be a vital necessity for mankind.

From that promise we can be sure of the restoration of a pure language, and from that promise follows the expectation that all languages will be replaced by God's pure language. The confounding of the language at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:7) will be reversed.

Other needs will also be met:

"... they shall build houses and inhabit them" (Isaiah 65:21),

"... they shall not build and another inhabit" (Isaiah 65:22).

These verses indicate the assurance of accommodation, although not the construction of skyscrapers which entails enormous environmental damage and pollution.

More promises are a sound basis for further expectations:

"... they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them" (Isaiah 65:21),

"... they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree" (Micah 4:4, Zechariah 3:10).

These verses indicate the success of growing fruit, which could be expected to include *"... every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food"* (Genesis 2:9).

At the present time we know of an astonishing number and variety of fruit, and that verse in Genesis could be the basis for understanding that God originally intended mankind to eat fruit to nurture life, although the tree of life (Genesis 2:9) was provided to prolong it.

However, without any verse to support the idea, it could be expected that our diet should also include vegetables, although none is named in that passage in Genesis.

But cereal grains, such as corn (Genesis 27:28), wheat (Genesis 30:14), and barley (Ruth 1:22) were always included, mainly for the making of bread (Genesis 3:19).

[There could be added the names of several more grains which are grown in diverse places around the world at the present time, and many nuts of significant nutritious value could be expected to be provided in the great benevolence of God's generous bounty.]

When God created Adam and placed him in the garden he was told that he had been given fruit to eat (Genesis 1:29). He was also told that the beasts of the field were to eat herbs for their food (Genesis 1:30), which supports the expectation of only herbivorous beasts in the kingdom.

In both cases the Hebrew word is translated as 'meat' when it would be more accurately rendered as 'food', because fruit and herbs are not meat in the more conventional sense.

It was after the flood that God told Noah that he could add meat to the diet of himself and his family. *"Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things"* (Genesis 9:3). In this verse the Hebrew word for 'meat' is the same as before; it simply means food. God's instruction to Noah continued with, *"And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea: into your hand are they delivered"* (Genesis 9:2). Thus, it was at that time that God allowed mankind to take the flesh of beasts, birds and fish for food, and the meat was to supplement the fruit and herbs given from the beginning.

Down through the ages of Biblical and secular history there is some emphasis given to the importance and/or pleasure of eating meat, especially at feasts and banquets. The kings, patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament made sacrifices, usually of meat, and usually offered according to God's instructions (Exodus 8:27, 29:18). The day of atonement sacrifices were of great importance to God and his chosen people. The heathen nations also made sacrifices of the

same nature as shown by the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20–40).

In order to circumvent a discussion of 'sacrifice', attention should be given to Hosea 6:6 and the words, *"For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings"*, words which are quoted by Jesus in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. The word 'mercy' is rendered more closely by 'faithfulness' (or steadfast love; RSV).

The sacrifices that were required under the Old Covenant were not required when it was replaced by the New Covenant. This is in contrast with no prohibition on the eating of meat, which is generally acknowledged to be both nutritious and pleasurable.

However, we should not expect this practice to continue, because Adam was commanded to name the animals, a command which carried the implication of caring for them, and although Abel made an offering of "the firstlings of his flock" (Genesis 4:4), it was when God instructed Noah after the flood that permission was given to eat meat as food.

Conflicted by our awareness of the evil in the world around us, which must grieve the creator now as it did at the time of Noah (Genesis 6:6), God has provided in his word those signposts to the future which are the basis for our great expectations, and in his mercy, also given us the evidence to be convinced that our expectations will, at his chosen time, become reality.

A Conclusion

Despite the richness of the information about the kingdom that may be gleaned from God's promises and prophecies, the apostle Paul constrained the great expectations which may be built upon it, with his words of encouragement to the Corinthians:

*"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things ... **the good things** ... which God hath prepared for them that love him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

The information which we have been given about many of those good things justify fully our great expectations, while Paul's words are an admonition for us to accept the shallowness of our understanding relative to the supremacy of God's thoughts and ways.

We are greatly indebted to Paul for all that he has taught us in his epistles, and may respectfully credit him with greater knowledge than we have gained. On that basis we could expect him to have had the greater expectations. But he did not make any such claim, confessing to Timothy that *"... the time of my departure is at hand."* He made clear his standing before the Lord; *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."* And he revealed his expectation without claiming any favouritism; *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day"*. Then he humbly and generously included us by invitation; *"...and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

There are other things referred to, although without clarification, such as:

'judging angels' (2 Corinthians 6:3),
the nature of spirit beings and the 'rapture' (1 Thessalonians 3:13–18),
"neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (Luke 20:35),
special events such as having a meal with angels, as Abraham did (Genesis chapter 18),
Elijah's chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11), and ...
how to provide for the needs of multitudes of people (Matthew 14:13–21).

We may expect to be given the knowledge of all these things, which could be regarded as belonging to the good things *"... which have not entered into the heart of man"*.

In Retrospect

We have experienced the dangers of earth; we are aware of the frailties of the human body and the susceptibility of our minds; we admit our lack of knowledge about so much of God's creation.

Yet he has set down for us promises that, in this world in the kingdom ...

what is bad will be removed (Revelation 21:4),

what is wrong will be corrected (1 Peter 2:15),

what is good will be established (Revelation 21:3),

ignorance will be overcome (2 Timothy 2:4), and

the source of evil will be destroyed (Revelation 20:10).

These promises are the justification for our expectations; expectations which provide "... *the comfort of the scriptures* ..." (Romans 15:4) and convince us that they will be fulfilled.

An Epilogue

Charles Dickens was persuaded to conclude his well-known novel with a happy ending, and when Pip and Estella, who had both suffered years of turmoil and separation, met at the place of their trials, they both realised that they were more than just friends; and as Pip also realised that his great expectations were to be met, he wrote, with relief and confidence, that he saw no shadow of another parting from her.

If we make our calling and election sure (1 Peter 1:10), we also shall have a similarly felicitous experience; not at a conclusion of events, but at the beginning of the new age, because our great expectations will be met when we meet Jesus. We will be like him for we will see him as he is (1 John 3:2). We will be forever with him (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and we will be certain of knowing no shadow of another parting from him.

Postscript

Despite having discovered such a treasure-trove of great expectations, I expect that I have missed some.

But that tentative thought is overwhelmed by the realisation that most people in the world have no idea about such expectations.

And it would appear that the situation was the same in Peter's day, nearly two thousand years ago, shown by stating his expectation when he wrote:

"For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15).