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THE AUTHOR OF TIME

How God's Knowledge Reaches Beyond Time, Death and Human Choice, and Why Our Choices Are Still Our Own

A Continuous Jubilee Calendar Study

"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." — Revelation 22:13 (KJV)

Author's Note on Terminology: This paper uses the traditional Christian terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament" for clarity. The author recognizes that the books of the Old Testament are the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh, which Jewish tradition holds as complete Scripture in its own right, and quotes them with respect for that tradition.

> ***A note on what follows.*** *The interpretation in this paper is my best understanding of Scripture, reached by following its own examples and patterns. Where I draw a conclusion of my own, I label it as my study. Where I bring in history or science, I bring it in as supporting evidence, never as the foundation Scripture stands on. The paper is held to one rule above all others:*

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> ***Rule 1: No Scriptural conflicts.*** *No conclusion here may contradict any passage of Scripture. Where Scripture does not settle a detail, I say so plainly.*

Scripture is quoted from the King James Version. Pronouns for God and Christ are capitalized in the author's own words; KJV quotations are left as written.

1. The Questions We Carry

Where are the people we have lost? And if God already knows every choice we will ever make, are those choices really ours?

These sound like two different questions, but both are about time. We live one moment at a time. We can't remember tomorrow, and we can't change yesterday. Scripture presents God as the One who knows "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). Both questions come from the gap between how we live in time and how God sees it.

In this study I use a picture to explore that gap: the picture of an Author and a book. My argument is simple:

God sees all of time at once, so His knowing never forces our choosing, and death never takes anyone out of His hand. Those who die in Christ sleep until one great gathering, and their hope is resurrection.

The first five sections follow the Scriptures behind that understanding, separating what they say directly from the conclusions I draw. After that, we'll look more closely at three things that bear on it: how God has kept time in history, the visions He has given His people, and what science has found about time. Then we'll come to the end of the story, which is where all of this is headed.

We must allow Scripture to unfold as it states. When we do, the pieces fit together in a way that is, frankly, beyond cool. God's ways aren't just impressive. They are perfect.

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2. God Sees the Whole Story

God is not inside time the way we are

When God first called Moses, He spoke to him from a bush that burned without burning up, and sent him to lead Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Moses asked what name he should give the people, and the answer came in the present tense: “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:14).

Fifteen centuries later, some of the religious leaders argued with Jesus about who He was, and He used the same words of Himself: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). Abraham had lived about two thousand years before that conversation, and Jesus still spoke of Himself in the present tense. He didn’t say “I was.” He said “I am.”

Isaiah tells us where God lives: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy” (Isaiah 57:15). Moses wrote in a psalm: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2). And God says of Himself: “For I am the LORD, I change not” (Malachi 3:6).

In plain words: we live inside time, moving from one day to the next. God doesn’t. He was there before the world began, and He will be there without end. Time is change, one moment giving way to the next, and a God who says “I change not” (Malachi 3:6) isn’t carried along by time the way we are.

Time is something God made

Scripture opens with time beginning: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The first thing God spoke was light, and He named the very first unit of time from it: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). “And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day” (Genesis 1:5). On the fourth day He set lights in the sky to keep time for us: “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from

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the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years" (Genesis 1:14).

Days, seasons and years are not things God is subject to. They are things He made and handed to us.

Living a day, and remembering it

Think of the difference between living a day and remembering it. While we're living it, we don't know what the evening will bring. Looking back, we can see how all its moments fit together. Scripture invites us to think about a knowledge far more complete than ours, one that sees our whole lives that way, and it often uses the language of books and writing to describe it.

King David, who wrote many of the Psalms, marveled that God knew him before he was born: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:16). In other words, before David's body was even formed, God saw it and his days were written in God's book.

The prophet Malachi, speaking to discouraged believers who wondered whether serving God was worth it, told them God was listening and keeping a record: "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16). Nothing they said for Him was lost.

And when the apostle John was shown the future in the book of Revelation, he saw it as a sealed book in God's hand, opened one seal at a time: "And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals" (Revelation 5:1).

Scripture uses the same kind of language elsewhere. It pictures the heavens as a scroll that will one day be "rolled together as a scroll" (Isaiah 34:4). At the final judgment "the books were opened" (Revelation 20:12). And Jesus names Himself by the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet: "I am Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 22:13), the One who holds the whole text from first letter to last.

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In this study I bring these Scriptural images together into one picture: **God as the Author, and time as His book.** We live the book page by page. We can see only the page we're on; we remember earlier pages, more or less, and we can't see the pages ahead. The Author sees every page at once, because He is not inside the book.

What the picture means, and what it doesn't

Before going further, I need to be clear about the limits of this picture, because a careful reader will ask the obvious question: "Doesn't an author decide everything his characters do?"

A human author does. But **the book is an illustration of God's complete knowledge, not a claim that He scripts every human decision.** Scripture itself shows two different kinds of writing in God's books.

What God purposes, He writes and carries out. "Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:11). Creation, the coming of the Messiah, the cross, the resurrection, the gathering and the new earth are God's own acts, and nothing can stop them.

What people do, God sees and records. The "book of remembrance" (Malachi 3:16) records what God's people chose to say and do. At the judgment, the dead are judged "out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12). Those works are written because people did them.

God accomplishes His purposes, while people remain responsible for their choices. Section 3 shows from Scripture how both are true.

God's knowledge has no boundaries

The theologian's word for what God knows is *omniscience*: knowing all things. Scripture shows God's knowledge passing every limit that holds us in.

He knows every thought before we think it. David wrote: "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether" (Psalm 139:1-

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4). God knows when we sit down and when we get up. He understands our thoughts “afar off” (Psalm 139:2), before they even form, and every word before it reaches our tongue.

Nothing is hidden from Him. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13). “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5). We can fool other people, and sometimes ourselves. We can’t fool God.

He knows the future as clearly as the past. Through Isaiah, God challenged the idols of the nations around Israel, which could predict nothing: “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isaiah 46:9-10). God “calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Romans 4:17). When He says something will happen, it is as certain as if it already had.

He even knows what would have happened. Jesus did many of His miracles in the small towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida near the Sea of Galilee, and most of the people there still didn’t repent. He compared them with Tyre and Sidon, two pagan cities on the coast that Israel’s prophets had often condemned: “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matthew 11:21). Tyre and Sidon never saw those miracles, yet God knows exactly how they would have responded. His knowledge reaches not only what happens, but what would happen under any choice. That will matter a great deal in the next section.

David’s response to all this is the right one: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139:6). This paper doesn’t claim to explain everything about God’s knowledge. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever” (Deuteronomy 29:29). I aim to follow what is revealed and stop there.

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The Author entered His own story

If God were only outside time, He would be like an author who writes a book and never touches it again. Scripture tells us something more: the Author came into the story.

About a thousand years before Jesus was born, David wrote words in Psalm 40 that the book of Hebrews tells us are the voice of Christ: “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7). His coming was already written in Scripture, “the volume of the book” (Hebrews 10:7), and He came just as it was written: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). He came at exactly the right point in history: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

The One who inhabits eternity was born as a baby, lived one day at a time, grew up, grew tired, and died for us. No theory of time can explain that. God is not only beyond time. He came into it.

3. Knowing Is Not Forcing

Now we come to the hardest question, the one that troubles many believers and gives many skeptics a reason to walk away: **“If God already knows everything I will choose, didn’t He decide my outcome before I ever made a choice?”**

It’s a fair question, and it deserves a careful answer.

Knowing something doesn’t make it happen

Think about what you ate for breakfast this morning. You know it, and nothing you do now can make it untrue. But did your memory make you eat it? Of course not. You chose your breakfast, and your memory recorded the choice. The knowledge came from the choice; the choice didn’t come from the knowledge.

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To God, our future is like our past is to us

The objection feels strong because we picture God like a person inside time who somehow knows tomorrow in advance. For someone inside time, knowing the future for certain would seem to require controlling it.

But God isn't inside time. He "inhabiteth eternity" (Isaiah 57:15) and sees "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). When He knows your choice tomorrow, He isn't predicting it the way a weatherman predicts rain. He's seeing it, the way you see your own breakfast this morning. We call it "foreknowledge" because it's "fore," ahead of time, from where we stand. From where God stands, it is simply knowledge.

Your yesterday isn't unfree because you remember it, and your tomorrow isn't unfree because God sees it.

Which way the arrow points

God knows you will choose something because you will choose it. You don't choose it because God knows it. If you were going to choose differently, God would always have known the different choice. You can't make God wrong, but His seeing doesn't reach into your heart and move it.

In one sentence: **He knows what you'll do. He doesn't make you do it.**

Scripture shows God's knowledge leaves room for real choice

We don't have to rely on reasoning alone. Scripture gives real cases where God knew what would happen, and what happened depended on a human choice.

David at Keilah. Years before he became king, David was hiding from King Saul, who was jealous of him and wanted him dead. David and his men rescued a town called Keilah from Philistine raiders and stayed there for a while. Then word came that Saul was coming after him, so David asked God whether Saul would really come, and whether the townspeople he'd just rescued would hand him over: "Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men

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of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up" (1 Samuel 23:11-12).

God answered both questions: Saul will come, and Keilah will betray you. So David left: "Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbare to go forth" (1 Samuel 23:13). "Forbare" means Saul held back.

Neither thing God described ever happened. Saul never came, and the men of Keilah never handed David over. God knew exactly what would happen if David stayed. David chose to leave, and the outcome changed. God's knowledge included the road David didn't take. And that matters for us: God's knowing your future doesn't lock you onto one road.

Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, a brutal empire and Israel's enemy. God sent the prophet Jonah there with a warning that the city faced destruction. (Jonah tried to run the other way and ended up in the belly of a great fish before he went.) The question for us is what happened when the people responded: "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (Jonah 3:10).

Here "repent" doesn't mean God did wrong. It means He changed the action He had announced, because the people changed. God tells us this is how His warnings work: "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jeremiah 18:8). His warnings are real offers, and the response really matters.

"And ye would not." Scripture tells us God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Yet some are lost. If God decided every outcome, everything would turn out exactly as He wants. Near the end of His ministry, Jesus looked over Jerusalem, the city that had rejected so many of God's messengers and was about to reject Him, and He wept over it: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37).

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God's will was one thing; theirs was another; and theirs decided their outcome. A God who scripted every choice could never say "ye would not" (Matthew 23:37).

Names blotted out. When Israel worshiped a golden calf at Mount Sinai, Moses pleaded with God to forgive them, and God answered: "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Exodus 32:33). Jesus promises the opposite to those who stay faithful: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life" (Revelation 3:5). A fixed script would have nothing to blot out and nothing to overcome. God's book records real choices.

Some readers will ask how that fits with the book John saw "sealed with seven seals" (Revelation 5:1), closed so that no one could even look at it, which this research reads as the book of life. Scripture gives the key through Jeremiah, who was told to keep two copies of a deed, "both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open" (Jeremiah 32:14). In my study, the judgment works the same way. The open record of every life, "the books" (Revelation 20:12), is where the Son judges and where names are blotted out or confessed before the Father (Revelation 3:5). The Father's sealed book of life was already "written within and on the backside" (Revelation 5:1) before the judgment began, written by a Father who saw every free choice from the foundation of the world. It never changes, and when it is finally opened, it matches the Son's judgments name for name. My paper *The Books Were Opened* follows this in detail.

That's why God keeps putting the choice in front of us. Near the end of his life, Moses told the whole nation: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Both kinds of writing in one verse

Fifty days after the crucifixion, at the feast of Pentecost, Peter stood up in Jerusalem and spoke to the very crowd that had called for Jesus' death. In one sentence he showed God's purpose and human choice side by side: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

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The plan was God's "determinate counsel" (Acts 2:23), His settled purpose. The people who carried it out were seen ahead of time by God's "foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). And they still acted with their own "wicked hands" (Acts 2:23), so Peter held them responsible. God's plan didn't make their choice for them, and their choice didn't stop God's plan.

The ark and its passengers: what predestination decides

Some will say, "But Scripture uses the word *predestinate*. Doesn't that mean God decided who would be saved?" Let's read the verse carefully: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

In my reading, Paul places foreknowledge before predestination in his explanation. I understand that as a relationship between God's knowing and His purpose, not as two moments on God's clock: His purpose rests on His knowledge. And notice what is predestined: "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29), that is, to become like Jesus. What God decided in advance is the destination.

Peter says the same: believers are "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2). "Elect" means chosen, and the choosing rests on the knowing. And Paul tells us where the choosing happened: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Ephesians 1:4). Chosen "in him" (Ephesians 1:4), in Christ. Before the world was made, God decided that everyone who is in Christ would be holy and blameless before Him.

Noah's ark is Scripture's own picture of this. When the world had become so violent and corrupt that God determined to send a flood, He told Noah to build a great boat to save his family and the animals. God designed the ark, its single door and its purpose, and He decided when the door would close: "And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in" (Genesis 7:16). None of that was up for a vote.

But who walked through the door was each person's choice. The ark took years to build, and all that time it stood as a warning. Peter says "the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (1 Peter 3:20). God waited, patiently,

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which makes no sense if the outcome were already forced. Eight walked in. The rest chose not to.

The ark was predestined. The passengers chose.

The hard verses

Two passages are often raised against this, and they deserve a direct answer.

The first is a proverb of Solomon: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Proverbs 21:1). Look at the picture Solomon uses. A farmer directs a river by digging channels; he doesn’t create the water or change what water is. In my study, this verse describes God guiding the course of a ruler’s choices, as Section 6 will show He has done in history, not manufacturing the ruler’s will.

The second is Pharaoh, the king of Egypt who refused to let Israel go. God sent ten plagues on Egypt, and Scripture does say, “And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Exodus 9:12). But read the order. First, again and again, Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Every time a plague ended, he went back on his word: “But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said” (Exodus 8:15). “And Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go” (Exodus 8:32). (“Respite” means relief.) Only after that do we read that God hardened him. In my study, God confirmed the choice Pharaoh kept making; He gave Pharaoh what Pharaoh chose. And notice the words “as the LORD had said” (Exodus 8:15): God foresaw Pharaoh’s choice before Pharaoh made it, which is exactly what this section describes.

4. The Lamb Slain from the Foundation of the World

In Revelation, John describes the faithful as those whose names are written “in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). “The Lamb” is Jesus, the sacrifice for our sins. But how can He have been slain “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), when He died on one Friday in AD 30?

Scripture is clear that the cross happened once, in history: “but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of

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himself" (Hebrews 9:26). ("The end of the world" here means the last age of history.) Peter explains the rest: "But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:19-20).

In plain words: God planned the cross ("foreordained" it) before He made the world, and it was carried out openly ("manifest") at the time He chose. Written before. Lived once.

(Revelation 17:8 uses the same phrase for names "not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 17:8), so some read Revelation 13:8 as saying the names were written from the foundation. Either reading lands where Peter does: God's plan of the cross was settled before the world began.)

In the book picture, the last chapter is already written before a reader reaches it. To Adam, Abraham and David, the cross was centuries away. To God, who "calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Romans 4:17), it was certain. That's why the faithful who lived before the cross could be saved by it. Jesus said of Abraham, who lived two thousand years before Him: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). And of the faithful of the Old Testament: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (Hebrews 11:13). (My paper *Without Excuse* shows this in more detail.)

5. Death, Sleep and the One Gathering

Now we come to the question many of us carry most personally: where are the people we've lost?

The dead know nothing

Solomon, reflecting on life and death in the book of Ecclesiastes, wrote plainly: "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). "For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). A psalm says the

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same: “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psalm 146:4).

In plain words: between death and resurrection, the dead aren’t aware of anything, including time going by. That doesn’t mean they are gone forever. It means they are resting until God wakes them.

Death is a sleep

When Jesus’ friend Lazarus died, Jesus told His disciples he was asleep. They misunderstood, so He explained Himself plainly: “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11). “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (John 11:14). Then He went to the tomb and raised him.

The Old Testament uses the same picture. Job, a righteous man who lost almost everything he had, said: “So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep” (Job 14:12). And at the end of Daniel’s long life in Babylon, the angel told him: “But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days” (Daniel 12:13), that is, rest now, and rise to receive his inheritance at the end.

Sleep is the one experience everyone knows in which time disappears. You close your eyes, and the next thing you know it’s morning. Eight hours passed on the clock, and for you no time passed at all. That’s the picture God chose for death.

One gathering for everyone

Scripture doesn’t describe believers going to heaven one by one as they die. It describes one gathering, for all the faithful together, when Jesus returns.

Paul wrote about it to the young church in Thessalonica, a Greek city where he’d preached only a short time before he was driven out. Some of their members had died, and the believers were grieving and worried that their loved ones would miss Christ’s return. Paul answered:

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we

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believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

In plain words, step by step:

- Don't grieve like people with no hope, because the dead are only asleep (verse 13).
- Just as Jesus died and rose, God will bring those who sleep in Jesus with Him (verse 14).
- Those alive when Jesus comes won't "prevent," that is, go ahead of, the dead (verse 15).
- Jesus Himself comes with a shout and a trumpet, and the dead in Christ rise first (verse 16).
- Then the living are caught up together with them to meet the Lord, and we stay with Him forever (verse 17).
- So comfort each other with this (verse 18).

One coming, one trumpet, one moment. Paul told the church at Corinth it happens all at once: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52). Even the great heroes of faith, Abraham, Moses and the rest, wait for that day so that we all receive the reward together: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39-40).

One gathering, and the years between

So here is the question many Christians ask: "If there's only one gathering at the end, has my mother been waiting all these years?"

No. She hasn't waited at all.

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Imagine a wife who dies many years before her husband. He goes on living, carrying the ache of her absence through ordinary mornings, family celebrations, and the quiet of the house.

In the understanding presented here, she isn't watching those years pass. She rests, knowing nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5), unaware that any time has gone by. When he too dies, he rests.

At the resurrection, both wake to the same gathering, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Corinthians 15:52), and they are "caught up together" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). From her side, she closed her eyes, and the next thing she knew was the trumpet, the face of Jesus, and her husband beside her. From his side, the same. Neither of them lived through the waiting in the grave. The years of separation were real for him while he lived, but they are not a separation either of them must go on enduring.

On the world's calendar, it is one gathering. In each believer's experience, it is the very next moment after death. Both are true, measured from different places. In the book picture: a character who falls asleep in chapter 3 and wakes in chapter 20 doesn't live through chapters 4 to 19.

The verses often read the other way

This also explains the verses people often use to say the dead go straight to heaven.

Paul wrote that he was "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). In my study, that's exactly right from the believer's own experience: the next thing a believer knows after death is being with the Lord. There is no felt gap.

Then there's the thief on the cross. Two criminals were crucified with Jesus. One mocked Him, but the other believed and said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Jesus promised him paradise. But Jesus Himself didn't go to His Father that day; He lay in the tomb, and on Sunday morning He said, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17). Because the dead know nothing, the next thing the thief sees after closing his eyes is Jesus coming in His kingdom, just as he asked.

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And in Revelation, John sees the souls of martyrs “under the altar” (Revelation 6:9) crying “How long, O Lord” (Revelation 6:10). In this research’s reading, that is a picture like Abel’s, the first man ever murdered, whose blood God said “crieth unto me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10). Their blood calls for justice, and they are told to “rest yet for a little season” (Revelation 6:11), the language of sleep.

God holds the dead when they know nothing

When our minds go dark in death, God’s knowledge of us doesn’t.

In the middle of his suffering, Job prayed: “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!” (Job 14:13). Job knew he would know nothing in the grave. His hope was that God would remember him and set a time to wake him. God promises exactly that: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands” (Isaiah 49:15-16).

Jesus once answered a group called the Sadducees, who didn’t believe in any resurrection, and what He said only makes sense from outside time: “Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him” (Luke 20:37-38). Notice His reason: “that the dead are raised” (Luke 20:37). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob sleep in the dust. But to God, who sees the resurrection morning as clearly as we see this morning, they “all live unto him” (Luke 20:38).

So Paul could write, “that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). The people we’ve lost aren’t stuck somewhere watching the years crawl by, or watching us suffer without being able to help. They’re resting, held safe by God. For them, the wait is over in an instant. And the reunion they wake to is all of us, together, at the same moment, with the Lord.

6. Looking More Closely: God’s Timekeeping in History

So far we’ve considered what these Scriptures mean for our choices and for the people we’ve lost. But how does this understanding hold up when we turn to

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history, to accounts of people seeing heaven, and to the questions science raises about time? Those subjects deserve a look, as long as we keep clear what each one can and cannot tell us. We'll start with history.

God Himself says the proof that He is God is that He announces things before they happen: "Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isaiah 42:9). If God really sees the whole book at once, we might expect to see it in history: a schedule announced centuries ahead, kept to the year, through people who never knew they were keeping it. My research on the Continuous Jubilee Calendar (CJC) looks at one such announcement. I won't take you through the math here; the CJC Research Kit and the papers listed at the end do that. What matters for this paper is what the calendar shows about God.

God's clock and God's announcement

When God gave Israel His law, He gave them a clock made of years. Every seventh year the land was to rest, and after seven of those rest years came a fiftieth year of release, the Jubilee: "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years" (Leviticus 25:8). Think of it as God's own calendar: weeks made of years instead of days.

Centuries later, Israel had been carried away captive to Babylon. The prophet Daniel, by then an old man, was praying for his people and for Jerusalem, which lay in ruins. God sent the angel Gabriel to him with an announcement made on that same clock: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks" (Daniel 9:25). Then: "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:26), and "in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease" (Daniel 9:27).

In plain words: count weeks of years from a royal order to rebuild Jerusalem. After sixty-nine of those weeks, 483 years, the Messiah appears. In the middle of the last week He is "cut off" (Daniel 9:26), killed, and not for His own sins. Only after that are the city and the Temple destroyed.

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Who kept the schedule

Here is how that announcement was kept, and who kept it.

In 457 BC, Artaxerxes, king of Persia, issued an order for Jerusalem, for his own reasons of state. On the CJC, that year falls in a Jubilee. And the order itself invited people to choose freely: “I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee” (Ezra 7:13). A pagan king, making his own free choice, started God’s countdown without knowing it.

Count 483 years from 457 BC, and you arrive at AD 27, the year Jesus was baptized and began His ministry.

In AD 30, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, ordered Jesus’ crucifixion. He knew the decision was his: “knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?” (John 19:10). On the CJC, AD 30 falls in the exact middle of its seven-year week, “in the midst of the week” (Daniel 9:27). Even the day was set long before: Passover fell on Friday, April 7, fixed by the moon God placed in the sky at creation “for signs, and for seasons” (Genesis 1:14).

Forty years later, in AD 70, Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem and burned the Temple, after the Messiah had been cut off, in the order Daniel gave.

Earlier links in the CJC chain were set the same way, by an Assyrian army and a Babylonian king. Of the Assyrian, God said through Isaiah that He would use him to discipline His people, “Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so” (Isaiah 10:7). The Assyrian had his own plans and no idea he was serving God’s.

What this shows about God

None of these people believed Daniel’s prophecy or were trying to fulfill it. Each made his own decision, for his own reasons, and Scripture holds them responsible. Jesus told Pilate, “he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11), which means Pilate’s sin was real too, though lesser. And still, every choice landed where God’s calendar said it would, about five centuries after Daniel’s announcement and more than fourteen after the law of the Jubilee.

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I understand this pattern as an illustration of providence: people act for their own reasons, while God's purposes are accomplished through history. The calendar identifies the pattern; my conclusion about what it means is a theological interpretation. But I believe it is the one Scripture itself gives. When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and he later rose to rule Egypt and save them from famine, he told them: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 50:20). And Solomon put it in one line: "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Proverbs 16:9).

It fits what we've seen about God's knowledge. A God who sees every page at once could see Artaxerxes' choice, Pilate's choice and Rome's choice before any of those men were born, announce the schedule through Daniel, and place His own acts exactly where they belonged: the count of years in His law, the moon in the sky, and His Son sent "when the fulness of the time was come" (Galatians 4:4). If God can keep His calendar across centuries while leaving emperors free and responsible, He can know your choices without making them for you.

Honest limits

My research always tries to be careful about what the calendar can and can't show. The CJC is never used for date-setting. It shows how God kept time in the past; it doesn't predict the day of Christ's return: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man" (Matthew 24:36). The calendar shows alignments, but it can't prove why they happened; a skeptic may say "coincidence," and each reader must weigh that for himself. And some details are debated; for example, some scholars date Artaxerxes' order to 458 BC rather than 457 BC. The CJC Research Kit sets out the evidence, the debated points, and the tests the calendar didn't pass as well as the ones it did.

7. Visions, and Accounts of Seeing Heaven

Some people who survive a medical crisis describe vivid experiences of heaven: light and peace, meeting Jesus, seeing relatives who died long before. Some describe days spent walking with Jesus, shown everything from creation to the

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new earth. How might someone who holds the understanding of death presented here approach those reports?

(A practical note: accounts like these often grow as they're retold. "My heart stopped for a minute or two" can become "I was brain-dead for an hour." It's always worth finding the person's own original account before relying on the details.)

What the resurrection accounts do, and do not, tell us

Scripture records several people raised from the dead. Elijah prayed over a widow's young son, "and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived" (1 Kings 17:22). Jesus raised the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, a synagogue leader, saying "the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth" (Mark 5:39). Peter raised a generous believer named Tabitha (Acts 9:40). Paul revived a young man named Eutychus, who fell asleep during a long sermon and fell from a third-story window (Acts 20:10). And Jesus raised Lazarus, who had "been dead four days" (John 11:39). Lazarus became so well known that crowds came "that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead" (John 12:9).

These accounts don't tell us what, if anything, those people experienced while dead. Scripture simply doesn't record it. So I wouldn't use them to build a detailed picture of that interval. What we can say is that Scripture's clear teaching, that "the dead know not any thing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5), stands, and nothing in these accounts contradicts it.

Scripture's main answer: God shows people the future in visions

What Scripture does record, over and over, is God letting living people see future events as if they were happening in front of them. These are called visions.

Late in his life, the apostle John was exiled for his faith to a small island called Patmos. There, God gave him the visions recorded in Revelation. A voice told him, "Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter" (Revelation 4:1). He then saw the gathered saints before nearly any of them had been born: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man

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could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Revelation 7:9). He even saw the holy city coming down at the very end: "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven" (Revelation 21:2). John was seeing the last pages of the book before they happened.

Daniel, centuries earlier, saw the final judgment: "the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Daniel 7:10). And the prophet Ezekiel, living as an exile in Babylon, felt himself lifted up and carried hundreds of miles to Jerusalem, and Scripture says it happened "in the visions of God" (Ezekiel 8:3). His body never left Babylon.

The Transfiguration

The closest match in Scripture to what people describe today is an event Christians call the Transfiguration.

Jesus had told His disciples that some of them would "not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28). About a week later, He took three of them, Peter, James and John, up a high mountain. There His appearance changed: "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him" (Matthew 17:2-3). ("Elias" is Elijah.)

Moses had died about fourteen centuries earlier. Yet the disciples saw him, in glory, talking with Jesus beside Elijah, whom God had taken up without death (2 Kings 2:11). On the way down the mountain, Jesus told them, "Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matthew 17:9). The word Jesus used means something seen, and Peter never forgot what he saw; years later he wrote that they "were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). As I understand it, Moses was truly there, raised by God (Jude 1:9), and the scene was a real preview of His coming kingdom, given ahead of time. (See my paper What Is Death?)

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How this explains what people report (my study)

Because God sees every page at once, He can show a person any page He chooses, including the last one. So when someone at the edge of death sees loved ones waiting in glory, in my study the best Scriptural explanation is that God has shown them the gathering as it will be, the same way John saw the great multitude long before it gathered, and Daniel saw that “the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom” (Daniel 7:22) centuries before it came. Their relatives are still asleep (Ecclesiastes 9:5). The gathering still happens once (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). And what the person saw can still be true, because God has already written it.

The person may honestly feel they traveled to heaven. Paul, describing a vision of his own, couldn’t tell the difference either: “whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth” (2 Corinthians 12:2).

Why a vision doesn’t break the laws of time

A vision fits everything Scripture says about death, and it doesn’t break a single law of time God built into creation.

Nobody travels through time. The person’s body stays on earth’s clock the whole time, whether in a hospital bed in our day or on the island of Patmos in John’s. Cause and effect stay in order. What moves is knowledge, and God already has all of it. A vision works the way prophecy always has: Daniel didn’t travel to the future; God showed him, and he wrote it down.

The time inside a vision doesn’t have to match the clock, either. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he showed Him “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time” (Luke 4:5). That was a false offer from the enemy, which reminds us that visions must be tested, but it also shows that what is seen in a vision isn’t tied to the clock. Hours with Jesus could pass in moments on earth’s clock, or the other way around: “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Meanwhile, the body living in earth’s time still feels the effects; after one of his visions, Daniel wrote, “I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days” (Daniel 8:27).

And the dead aren’t disturbed. The relatives someone sees are shown as they will be at the gathering, not woken early.

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Scripture's test

Not every vision comes from God. God's law forbade Israel from trying to contact the dead (Deuteronomy 18:11), and Paul warns that "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Isaiah gave the test: "should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:19-20).

An experience that fits the vision pattern points to Jesus, agrees with Scripture, and shows the joy that waits for the faithful. An experience that fails the test has dead relatives giving new messages, teaches that everyone goes to heaven regardless of Christ, or brings back teaching Scripture contradicts. Even Paul was told not to repeat what he heard in his vision (2 Corinthians 12:4), and Scripture warns against adding to it (Revelation 22:18).

Some experiences may simply be what a brain does at the edge of death; most modern accounts come from people whose brains were revived before death became final. We can't know which explanation is true for any one person. God knows.

Scripture never made these experiences the foundation of faith. In one of His parables, Jesus has Abraham say: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31). But Scripture does leave room for them. God has always shown His people pages from the end of the book.

8. What Science Has Found About Time

In the last hundred years, science has discovered things about time that agree with what Scripture said thousands of years ago. You don't need any of this to accept what Scripture teaches. I include it because creation itself testifies about its Maker: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Romans 1:20). Everything in this section comes from outside Scripture, and I'll mark what is still debated.

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Time runs at different speeds

People used to think time ticked the same everywhere, like one giant clock behind the universe. In the early 1900s Albert Einstein showed it doesn't. **The faster something moves, the slower its clock ticks** compared to ours, and **clocks closer to something heavy, like the earth, tick slower too.**

This is established science and has been measured many times. In 1971, scientists flew atomic clocks around the world on passenger jets, and when they landed the clocks no longer matched the ones left on the ground, by just the amounts Einstein predicted. The GPS satellites your phone uses run about 38 millionths of a second a day fast because of their speed and height; without correcting for it, your phone's map would be off by miles within a day.

In plain words: time isn't a fixed backdrop. It stretches and bends. It's part of creation, just as Scripture said: God made the lights "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years" (Genesis 1:14). And in the standard scientific account of the universe, time itself has a beginning (the widely held view, though the earliest moments are still debated), just as Scripture opens: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

Light stands at the edge of time

In Einstein's science, light's speed is the one thing that never changes, and everything else, including time, adjusts around it. The closer something gets to light's speed, the slower its clock runs, and light itself sits at the limit where the clock stops. Scientists sometimes say that if light could experience anything, a beam leaving a distant star would arrive in your eye with no time passed for it at all, even if the trip took a million years by our clocks.

Scripture gave light that same unique place from its first page: light was the first thing God spoke, and the first day was named from it (Genesis 1:3, 5). Scripture also uses light to describe God: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). That speaks first of His holiness and truth; it doesn't mean God is made of the physical light scientists measure, because physical light was created. But think about this: even the light God created stands at the very edge of time. The God who spoke it into being stands beyond both light and time. He made the sun stand still for Joshua in battle (Joshua

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10:13), and turned back the shadow on King Hezekiah's sundial as a sign (Isaiah 38:8). Light and the clock both obey Him.

One meeting, different amounts of time

Because clocks tick at different speeds, two people can live through different amounts of time on the way to the same moment. Scientists illustrate this with twins: one stays on earth, the other travels on a rocket near the speed of light and returns. When they meet, they agree it's the same reunion, but one has aged forty years and the other only a few. Neither twin's time ran backward. They just lived through different amounts of it.

That's the same shape as the husband and wife in Section 5: one gathering, one shared moment, and very different amounts of time lived on the way there. To be clear about where science stops: it shows people can live through different amounts of time; it doesn't show the dead experience nothing. That comes from Scripture (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Science supplies the picture; Scripture supplies the truth.

All of time together? (still debated)

Einstein's work also showed there is no single "now" that everyone in the universe shares. From that, many scientists (not all) conclude that past, present and future are all equally real, like a complete map with every moment laid out from beginning to end. They call this the "block universe." It is an interpretation, not a proven fact. Einstein himself seems to have held something like it. When his lifelong friend Michele Besso died in 1955, Einstein wrote to the family that, for physicists like him, the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion (as the letter is commonly translated).

Scientists call it a block. Scripture's own images were a book and a scroll, held by the One who is "the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:13). But a block has no author, and science can't say who made it, why it has a beginning and an end, or how the One outside it could enter it. Scripture answers all three: "All things were made by him" (John 1:3); "My counsel shall stand" (Isaiah 46:10); "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

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Agreement, not proof

Scientific ideas get improved over time; Einstein improved on Newton. So I don't say science proves Scripture. I say it agrees with Scripture, once Scripture is applied correctly. If science changes its picture tomorrow, God's Word doesn't move: "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89).

9. The Story Ends in Life

Every book has a last page, and Scripture tells us how this one ends.

A psalm says the heavens will wear out like old clothes and be replaced, while God Himself never changes: "Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end" (Psalm 102:25-27). In this research's reading of the chain of events, the day of the Lord begins at Christ's coming, the saints reign with Him a thousand years, and the final fire comes at the end of the thousand years: "and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them" (Revelation 20:9).

Then the Author begins a new book. John saw it: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" (Revelation 21:1). "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: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:4-5).

Will there be time in eternity?

People sometimes say there will be no time in heaven. Scripture doesn't say that. What ends is time as we know it: time measured by death, decay and loss. The new earth still keeps God's calendar: "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 66:23). The tree of life "yielded her fruit every month" (Revelation 22:2). Even now there is sequence in

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heaven: “there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour” (Revelation 8:1).

(Some quote “that there should be time no longer” (Revelation 10:6) to say time itself ends. In this research’s reading, that verse belongs to the seventh angel’s days and announces that the delay is over.)

In my study, this is the final answer to the questions we began with. In this life, time is something we suffer: it takes our loved ones and wears out our bodies. In death, it vanishes for us entirely. And in the new earth, time is given back to us as a gift, measured from one sabbath to another, in the presence of the One who “inhabiteth eternity” (Isaiah 57:15).

Conclusion

We began with two questions: where are the people we’ve lost, and if God knows our choices, are they really ours?

Scripture answers both. God “inhabiteth eternity” (Isaiah 57:15) and sees the whole of time at once. His knowledge has no boundaries, yet knowing is not forcing: He knows what we’ll do, and He doesn’t make us do it. He accomplishes His own purposes, from the cross foreordained “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20) to the new earth, while every person remains responsible for his own choices. The ark was predestined; the passengers chose.

And death doesn’t take anyone out of His hand. The dead sleep, knowing nothing, held by the God for whom “all live unto him” (Luke 20:38). For each believer, the next moment after death is the resurrection. For history, it is one gathering, when we are all “caught up together” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). After that, God makes all things new.

History, visions and science each add their witness. God kept His calendar across centuries through free hands. He has shown His people pages from the end of the book. And science has found that time is part of creation, bending and stretching in ways that fit what Scripture said first.

This picture doesn’t make our choices smaller. It makes them matter more. The God who sees the whole book isn’t reading a script He forced on us. He is watching real people make real choices, and He is pleading with every one of

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them to choose life. Today is your page. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

Sources and References

Scripture: all quotations are from the King James Version (KJV).

Science (outside Scripture, cited as supporting illustration): Albert Einstein, “On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies” (1905), the special theory of relativity; Albert Einstein, the general theory of relativity (1915-1916). J. C. Hafele and R. E. Keating, “Around-the-World Atomic Clocks,” *Science* 177 (1972). Neil Ashby, “Relativity in the Global Positioning System,” *Living Reviews in Relativity* 6 (2003). Einstein’s letter to the family of Michele Besso, March 1955, as commonly translated.

Related CJC papers

- Could It Have Been Planned? — The Timeline of the Messiah and the Question of Providence
- The Books Were Opened — How God’s Judgment Works, and What It Means to Be Blotted Out
- Without Excuse — How God Judges Every Person Fairly, Even Those Who Never Heard
- Fear Not the Second Death — What Scripture Teaches About the Thousand Years, the Book of Life, and the End of Sin
- The Shepherd’s Gathering — What Scripture Teaches About the Timing of the Rapture and the Last Trumpet
- Seventy Weeks, No Gap — Why Daniel’s Seventieth Week Is Not Future

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