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Eschatology or the Doctrine of Last Things

Prophecy is extremely important to Pentecostal believers. In the early days of the 20th century movement, the soon return of Christ was a major emphasis. For these Pentecostal pioneers, Jesus was the center of their lives. He was the Savior not willing that any should perish. He was the Baptizer who empowers believers to carry the message of hope and deliverance to the ends of the earth. He was the Healer who supernaturally restores broken and hurting bodies to health. And seldom was a sermon preached in those early days that did not remind listeners that Jesus was coming soon—very soon!

But we must now ask ourselves: “Does the truth of Christ’s return energize our ministry as it did the Early Church and the early 20th century Pentecostals?” As you begin this study of eschatology, or the study of last things, you must understand the tremendous importance of the subject. Curiosity about what will happen and when it will happen is normal. But that is not the main purpose of this study. The Holy Spirit desires to make these truths come alive in the deepest recesses of your heart for two vital purposes: (1) to help you live a holy life, even as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16), and (2) to send you wherever God calls you to go with His message of salvation (Mark 16:15). We will be praying that you experience the divine presence of the Holy Spirit as you study this course.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to

1. Explain how biblical prophecy is strong evidence the Bible is divinely inspired.
2. Describe the past, present, and future of God’s plan for redeeming a fallen human race.
3. Explain what happens to the believer between death and resurrection at the Rapture.
4. List and indicate the importance of Old and New Testament covenants in God’s plan.
5. Distinguish clearly between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ.
6. Describe how Christians should be living in expectation of Christ’s coming.
7. Explain how the Great Tribulation relates to the “Day of the Lord.”
8. Identify the evil forces who defy God in the Tribulation.
9. Explain the significance of the seals, trumpets, and bowl judgments of the Tribulation.

10. Describe Armageddon as the ultimate conflict between God and Satan.
11. Name and explain the major historical views of the Millennium.
12. Describe the activities of Israel and the saints during the Millennium.
13. Explain how the New Heaven and New Earth will be different from the Millennial reign of Christ.

<h1 style="margin: 0;">Unit 1</h1>	<h2 style="margin: 0; color: #800040;">The Past and Present as Prologue to the Future</h2>
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Eschatology is the branch of theology or doctrine concerning the ultimate or final things, such as death, the destiny of humanity, the Second Coming and the Last Judgment. Our need to understand this area of doctrine is an important part of understanding inspired Scripture. Believers also have genuine questions and concerns about the future, and what will take place as this age draws to a close. In this course, we will study the details of how the various prophetic passages of Scripture provide an ordered framework to answer our questions about the happenings of the end-time.

The apostle Paul wrote his second epistle to the Thessalonians to correct some false teachings that lead to misconceptions about the future. The Thessalonian believers were frightened, since they were undergoing severe persecution and were being told by false teachers that they had missed the Day of the Lord. Paul wrote words of assurance and guidance to the Thessalonians to address their concerns.

For a moment, set this IST aside, and read aloud the first two chapters of 2 Thessalonians. As you do, try to comprehend the impact this message could have had on the believers in Thessalonica who received Paul's letter for the first time. What would have challenged them? What would have brought comfort and guidance? What would have helped them as they looked to the future?

In chapter 1, we will examine points you may have noticed as you read in 2 Thessalonians. We will also look at the impact of various perspectives in eschatology.

Chapter 1 Understanding Bible Eschatology

Lessons

- C1.1 The Value of Studying End-time Events
- C1.2 Overview of the History of Prophecy in Relation to End-time Events
- C1.3 The Biblical Validity of Premillennialism

Chapter 2 A Plan from the Beginning

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- C2.1 Creation as the Beginning of God's Plan

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Chapter 3 The Believer's Afterlife Between Death and the Rapture

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Understanding Bible Eschatology

Two ministers were having a friendly conversation. One asked the other, "Can someone write history before it has taken place?" Without much thought, but with great wisdom, the other replied, "Yes, if God writes it" (Titterington 1957, 18). Fortune tellers and soothsayers may claim to reveal the future, but only God knows the end from the beginning. The One who alone knows the future warned His people, "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:31). Consulting horoscopes, astrology, or signs of the zodiac would be modern ways of seeking out the future by means that God does not permit. However, all we need to know about the future is contained in God's inspired Word, the Bible.

Bible prophecy can be defined in a number of ways. Does it include only predictions about the future, or can it also be non-predictive? Must divine prophecy be unconditional, or is it contingent upon certain other factors? Depending on how one defines prophecy, Bible scholars claim that one quarter to one-third of Holy Scripture is prophetic (Pentecost 1964, 13). Even if we considered the lowest percentage, the amount of prophecy already fulfilled, along with that which is yet to be fulfilled, is noteworthy. It may be that the Author of the Bible desires His people to give more attention to what the Bible tells us about the future.

This course is only an introduction to eschatology, but from it we can begin a lifetime of growing awareness. God has not only been at work throughout history; He will bring about the ultimate fulfillment of His purposes through Christ and His glorious return.

Lesson 1.1 The Value of Studying End-time Events

Objectives

1.1.1 Examine how prophecy in general is evidence that the Bible is inspired by God.

1.1.2 Indicate how our understanding of end-time prophecy influences our world view.

1.1.3 Describe the impact of prophecy on evangelism and missionary outreach.

Lesson 1.2 Overview of the History of Prophecy in Relation to End-time Events

Objectives

1.2.1 Summarize the early church's position on premillennialism.

1.2.2 Explain why amillennialism and postmillennialism prevailed after Bible days.

Lesson 1.3 The Biblical Validity of Premillennialism

Objectives

1.3.1 Distinguish between the Rapture and the Second Coming.

1.3.2 Summarize the weaknesses of a postmillennial view of eschatology.

1.3.3 Outline the bases of amillennialism.

1.1

The Value of Studying End-time Events

Why were the believers suffering?

How does Paul describe the end-time victory of Christ over Satan and his evil forces at the end of the Tribulation?

Believers can become preoccupied with trying to predict end-time events, or they can be impacted by unhealthy fears about the future. We need to be reminded about God's larger prophetic purposes: Christ could return for the church at any time and, through Him, Satan and evil will ultimately be conquered. Though evil seems to triumph in some places and believers are suffering persecution in some parts of the world, God will never forsake His own. Christ's soon return is our central focus, and we can be assured that He will bring every believer safely to glory. As Paul reminds us, we are on the winning side of a great spiritual battle, and evil will be defeated. God has declared this, and we can take great comfort in the fact. As you review 2 Thessalonians 1 and 2 and respond to the interactive questions, consider the hope and the solid assurance that Christ has provided for you as a believer. Notice the way that Paul brought encouragement and guidance to the believers in Thessalonica concerning the events of the end times.

Examine how prophecy in general is evidence that the Bible is inspired by God.

Bible Prophecy as Evidence of Inspiration

One biblical scholar, who has categorized all the prophetic statements in Scripture, lists 1,817 predictions in the entire Bible: 1,239 in the Old Testament and 578 in the New Testament (Payne 1973, 675). John F. Walvoord, another prophecy scholar, notes, “Because approximately half of the prophecies of the Bible have already been fulfilled in a literal way, it gives a proper intellectual basis for assuming that prophecy yet to be fulfilled will likewise have a literal fulfillment” (1999, 10). Not only does past fulfillment lead to the conclusion that future prophecies will also be fulfilled, but the accuracy of fulfilled prophecy strongly underscores the divine inspiration of the Bible.

What does Paul say will happen to those who persecute God’s children?

What does Paul encourage suffering saints to do in the face of persecution?

No human being could make such accurate predictions about the coming birth of Christ hundreds of years before His actual birth. The birth of Jesus was foretold by the prophet Micah approximately 700 years before the event (Micah 5:2, 4–5). The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was foretold by Zechariah 500 years before Christ was born (Zechariah 9:9). The betrayal of Jesus was foretold about the same time (Zechariah 11:12–13). Zechariah also foretold of the death of Jesus (12:10). The passion of Christ at His crucifixion was foretold 1,000 years earlier in the Psalms (22:14–18). Finally, Christ’s suffering and ministry were foretold by Isaiah approximately seven hundred years before the earthly life of Christ (Isaiah 53:4–7, 9, 11–12).

The Bible is divinely inspired of God and is “the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct” (Fundamental Truth Number 1 of the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths).

Indicate how our understanding of end-time prophecy influences our world view.

Prophecy’s Influence on History, Current Events, and the Future

Historians attempt to find meaning in the rise and fall of past civilizations, kingdoms, and even more contemporary governments. They seek to explain why one king went to war against another kingdom. Secular philosophers will always engage in debate about such matters. The Bible demonstrates that history is actually an unfolding of God’s plan for the human race, with the ultimate purpose of revealing himself to every person. We see God’s love, mercy, and holiness in His dealings with humankind throughout history. Bible prophecy is a guide to understanding the full meaning of history.

A student of Scripture becomes aware of the many statements of Bible prophecy that still relate to the future. One also becomes aware of Jesus’ teaching concerning the imminence of His return. The imminence of His return means that it could occur at any time—and Jesus warns us to be ready (Luke 12:35–40; Mark 13:33–37). This means that rather than trying to look at each major world event as a possible piece of the puzzle that must be put in place before Jesus can be allowed to return, we must lift our eyes above these events and see that Christ’s return for the church is possible at any time. Speaking of this, Jesus said, “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come” (Mark 13:33). Rather than being alarmed or dismayed about current or future events, we need to keep our primary focus on the majesty and greatness of Christ’s return, which could happen at any time. The return of Jesus is truly awe inspiring. It is something we should wait for and long for (2 Timothy 4:8). It is our Blessed Hope (Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17).

The world searches for peace at any cost, but instead finds their comfort and safety threatened more and more. Rather than showing concern for the pain and suffering of others, many are consumed with efforts to preserve their own resources. They strive to gain “just one more fling” in case the future becomes a nightmare. Understanding the future in light of Christ’s return gives believers assurance and confidence. Yes, there will be trials, tests, difficulties, and even some tribulation. Believers must remain faithful through it all. The Great Tribulation toward which the world is headed will only be observed from heaven, as we are with Christ our King. Jesus spoke to His disciples, “In

the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NKJV). Believers still have tribulation, but nothing like the Tribulation described in biblical prophecy. Such assurance is the blessing that comes with understanding end-time prophecy.

While refusing to believe in God, the world has no fear of punishment for ignoring and disobeying His commands nor His appeals revealed in His Word. The only authority they acknowledge is human government and law, but the Christian understands and is assured that an all-seeing God knows everything that happens. The believer knows God is the God of love, that His encouragements to do good and His admonitions to avoid evil are for our own good. We understand prophecy as truth that is given to us by a just God who warns and ultimately judges those who reject Him and His divine will. Prophetic truth should make us want to live a life that is devoted to Christ and His purposes.

For the dedicated Christian, life is more than avoiding evil actions. We are placed on earth for a divine purpose. Thus, Peter writes, “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:15–16). Christ’s imminent return provides the incentive to conduct our lives in a way comparable to the character of God himself. That sounds impossible in the natural, but Jesus has delivered on His promise to send another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who helps the Spirit-filled believer live a holy life. Christ’s return, the centerpiece of biblical prophecy, provides the incentive for living a holy life. When the rewards are passed out at the Judgment Seat of Christ, a life lived for Christ will be amply rewarded.

Describe the impact of prophecy on evangelism and missionary outreach.

Understanding Eschatology and Its Impact on Evangelism

In the last week of His earthly life, Jesus spoke at length with His disciples about near and more distant future events. In answer to their question about the future of the massive stones in the temple, Jesus gave a lengthy explanation. First, He described the signs of the end of the age and the fact that no one but the Father in Heaven knows the day or hour when the **Rapture** or Christ’s sudden coming and “catching up” His children will occur, bringing the church age to an end (Matthew 24). Then He told the parables of the Ten Virgins and the Talents, both of which stressed the need to be ready at all times for His return (Matthew 25). Jesus concluded His address of warning by describing the coming judgment that would separate the righteous from the ungodly, both of nations and individuals.

Jesus gave vivid descriptions of the future to His disciples. But after His resurrection, Jesus gave specific instructions concerning the gospel: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20). While the disciples would encounter opposition and times of persecution, Jesus assured them that He would be with them to the end of the age in the awesome task of spreading the gospel. The assurance of His presence and the power of the Holy Spirit gave Christ’s faithful witnesses a boldness that ultimately spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. Today, rather than causing fear or intimidation, our awareness of end-times prophecy should encourage faithful witnessing.

The Great Commission has never been completed. It is still God’s plan for reaching the world until the rapture of the true church. Only then does our commission end. Then terrible events will begin to unfold on earth. Jesus told His disciples that a time will come when no one can work. The events on earth during the Great Tribulation will be a time of great darkness. This reminds us that in the present time we are called to be faithful witnesses to the lost that we meet day after day. And we must go as missionaries, or send those who can go, to the uttermost parts of the earth to give every person a chance to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

Why did God include details of the future in His Holy Word?

We can accept Christ as our Savior, knowing that He died on the Cross for our sins, without having to know all about the distant future. God’s purpose of including prophecy in His inspired Word is explained clearly in Isaiah 48. Speaking through the prophet, God said to the stubborn, rebellious Israelites: “Therefore I told you these things long ago; before they happened I announced them to you so that you could not say, ‘My idols did them; my wooden image and metal god ordained them’ ” (v. 5). The fulfillment of biblical prophecy magnifies and brings glory to God.

Your overview of biblical prophecy and particularly its inclusion of the end-time events will help you see God’s greatness through another aspect of His nature. Some are attracted to the study of biblical prophecy, with the hope of hearing a Bible teacher name the Antichrist who may already be on earth. Or they may desire to hear what countries or nations in the world today fulfill the veiled references in Scripture. You will not find such speculations in this study. Only the nation of Israel will be noted by name, since God has a special place for Israel in end-time events. Nor will we speculate on the identity of Antichrist, as when some in the past have named Hitler, Mussolini, or other major world

figures as the embodiment of this prophetic figure. Rather, our study of eschatology finds its focus on God and His Son Jesus Christ, who is the central figure of all Bible prophecy.

1.2	Overview of the History of Prophecy in Relation to End-time Events
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Recently, a team of researchers lead by a mathematics professor did a study with the objective of computing the chance of eight prophecies being fulfilled in one person. The result was an unfathomable ratio—one in a hundred quadrillion (100 with 15 additional zeros). Yet Jesus, the center of all biblical prophecy, fulfilled more than 110 Old Testament prophecies (Payne 1973, 665–668). Here are just a few:

Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).

He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

He would be anointed with God's Spirit, for preaching the gospel (Isaiah 11:2).

He would carry our diseases and sorrows in a healing ministry (Isaiah 53:4).

He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).

He would be pierced and crushed for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5).

His side would be pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

His clothes would be gambled over beneath the cross (Psalm 22:18).

He would be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9).

He would rise from the dead (Psalm 16:10).

He would ascend to the Father's right hand (Psalm 8:3).

There is no doubt that the early Christians saw that the prophecies above were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. With so many prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the early believers had a solid foundation and a solid reason to believe that prophecies that were yet unfulfilled would also take place. They may have had questions about when these unfulfilled prophecies would happen, but had no doubt that God's Word would be fulfilled.

\Summarize the early church's position on premillennialism.

The Early Church and Premillennialism

What kind of messiah are non-Christian
Jews looking for?

There have been various interpretations of prophecy throughout church history. Even as the apostles Paul and John were writing about things yet to happen, there were those who rejected the prophecy of Christ's triumphal victory over Antichrist and Satan. All they could see in the Old Testament were the prophecies about the restoration of Israel as a nation. But many received the New Testament as the record of God's Son, Jesus, coming to die for our sins, and they believed that the prophecies about the end-time events would be fulfilled literally as described in both the Old and New Testaments. Today, Jews are still looking for a Messiah. They see that Messiah as the one who will restore the nation of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital, and where Jews can live in peace and prosperity.

How can a Christian believe that the incredible end-time things described in biblical
prophecy can literally happen?

Paul was depicting the return of Christ for the church when he wrote, "The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18). The believers of Thessalonica were encouraged to believe firmly in the reality of Christ's imminent return, knowing that then they would be with the Lord forever.

*Explain why amillennialism and postmillennialism prevailed
after Bible days.*

Amillennialism and Postmillennialism in History

What caused early expositors to shift from treating prophecies relating to the future as mainly predictive statements toward treating them as allegorical interpretations?

Although there was always a voice of support for a literal interpretation of Bible prophecy, as time passed, a growing number of voices began teaching that the real meaning of prophecy was allegorical, only showing that the church would ultimately triumph over evil. Some of the voices that promoted allegorical interpretation were eloquent and influential. St. Augustine was a strong proponent of allegorical interpretation. He went so far as to say that the interpretation of the Catholic Church was the true meaning of the allegory.

Is it incorrect to use allegorical interpretation to teach important spiritual truth?

The allegorical method of interpreting biblical prophecy did not begin with a close study of Scripture. Instead, it grew out of external pressures: (1) the obvious reality that the end-time events had not taken place, and (2) the desire to make the Bible and Christian doctrine respectable in the eyes of secular philosophers and secular society. By describing the horrendous judgments of the Tribulation, the ugly beasts, and the diabolical enemies of God as only an allegory, the defenders of Christianity in a secular society did not have to face the ridicule of unbelievers. Church authors such as Augustine described the millennium as already on the scene in an allegorical way, rather than a literal, future reality.

Prophetic scriptures contain various types of symbolism. When Revelation speaks of “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon at her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Revelation 12:1), clearly symbolism is being used. The question is, what is the historical fact or future reality that the prophetic symbols stand for? That is one of the challenges of interpreting biblical prophecy, and not all believers will interpret symbols in the same way. With the widespread use of allegorical interpretation, however, there was the tendency to see only a symbolic battle between good and evil in the prophetic messages of the Old and New Testaments. With allegorical interpretation, the meaning of symbolism is read into Scripture from outside and separated from any meaning that would have been intended by the original writer of the biblical passage.

Although the church gained greater influence in medieval society during and after the time of Constantine, the church also became more and more influenced by various

traditions over time. The corrupting influence of tradition extended from the early Middle Ages into the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Reformation brought the authority of Scripture back into prominence, along with a renewed call to accurately interpret the meaning of God's Word. A key preparatory event for this time period was the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in the fifteenth century, which spread the printed word far and wide. Then the Bible translators of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries put the Bible into the hands of lay people who could read. John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, the King James translators, and additional translations in various languages all had an impact on bringing the authority of Scripture back to Christendom. Key reformers such as John Calvin and Martin Luther moved away from allegorical interpretation, although allegory was not totally repudiated. Prophecy was not the major focus of the Reformation, but in regard to eschatology many of the most influential Protestant theologians still held an amillennialist's viewpoint regarding the millennium.

Issues in Interpretation

Regarding prophecy, one interpretative challenge is to sort out the difference between what is a prophetic symbol or metaphor, and what is the historical reality or future event behind the symbol. Remember that dedicated followers of Christ can differ in their interpretation of some of the symbols in prophetic passages. Symbolism will be discussed at various points in chapters 7 through 11.

Another problem that has already touched on has been the tendency of some interpreters of Scripture to allegorize, which goes back to the early medieval church period. The tendency of allegorical interpretation is to take unpleasant or difficult truths, and turn them into allegories. This tendency to allegorize must be resisted by asking the key question, "What did the original writer of this passage of Scripture intend to communicate to his hearers?" In addition, the biblical context will often provide helpful clues as to the meaning of the passage.

A third problem has been the more recent influence of liberal theology, which typically denies the ability of the Holy Spirit to inspire Scripture to accurately predict future events. Liberal theologians deny most or all of the supernatural in Scripture, including the bodily resurrection of Christ, supernatural miracles, and predictive elements of God's Word. As these theologians compromise the authority of the infallible and divinely inspired Word of God, predictive prophecy is dismissed or explained away. Without a deep commitment to the timeless Word of God, even "theologians" can turn from the altar of devotion to a supreme God and bow at the altar of human reason. One result will be a denial of the ability of the Holy Spirit to inspire accurate predictive statements in Scripture.

In earlier church history, two different ways of looking at Bible prophecy—literal fulfillment or allegorical symbolism—resulted in different schools of belief, particularly in relation to the millennium. One group, the amillennialists, did not believe in a literal millennium when Christ is to reign for a thousand years on the earth. This group taught,

and still do, that the term *thousand* denotes a symbolic number, giving the millennium an allegorical or symbolic interpretation. Some amillennialists apply the term *millennium* to the present Church Age and see it as the actual time when current believers are reigning spiritually with Christ. Others use the term *millennium* for the present existence of deceased believers who are with Christ until the Rapture. We will look at both amillennialism and postmillennialism, another non-literal view, in greater detail in the next lesson.

The various interpretations of Bible prophecy all see Christ and righteousness prevailing in the end. Those in the camp of premillennialism, a less optimistic perspective, are the ones who see the victory of divine righteousness as coming at the end of a terrible time of Tribulation and judgment. The plain (simplest; most apparent) meaning of a literal reading of biblical prophecy denies that our world will get better and better until righteousness eventually overcomes evil. The world is becoming increasingly worse, and this will not end until Christ judges and destroys the satanic forces that now hold fast the minds and hearts of so many.

It is easy to think of our current generation as greater than, and specifically more important than, past generations. However, we must never lose sight of the past and how it has led to the world that we know today—both the church world and the lost world. Our salvation looks back to the sacrifice of God’s Son for our sins. The entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, focuses on that life-changing event, but the history of the church since the first century is also significant. It affirms why we believe as we do, and why we want to avoid the mistakes of the past. As Bible believers who take the Word as infallible and inerrant, we must avoid the pitfalls of allegorical interpretation, as well as the denial of predictive prophecy that is found in liberal theology. We must carefully interpret prophetic passages, considering the full biblical context in which they were written. We should seek to understand what the original biblical author was trying to communicate to his first audience. And we need to carefully consider God’s work in history, as well as His ultimate plans for the future.

The apostle John concluded his book of prophecy, as well as our entire Bible, with noteworthy words:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen. (Revelation 22:18–21)

These words remind us of the imminence of Christ’s return, and the authority of God’s prophetic Word.

1.3

The Biblical Validity of Premillennialism

With so many different interpretations of biblical prophecy, how can we identify the right one? A person's view of Holy Scripture is the first matter that must be settled. Is the Bible the actual Word of God, or is it a book that contains the divine word of God along with other elements of human origin? The Assemblies of God's view of the Holy Bible is clearly stated in its Statement of Fundamental Truths. "The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct" (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15–17; 2 Peter 1:21). In evaluating any interpretation of prophecy, we must affirm first the highest of respect for the Bible as God's Word for the world to which He sent His Son to die and provide our eternal salvation. Evangelical amellenailist and postmillennialist also insist on an infallible, inerrant Bible. So is this foundation enough?

No, that is only the first step. One can agree with the inerrancy of Holy Scripture, and then proceed to explain or interpret it in accordance with his or her own view and desires. There are various ways that this can happen. As we saw in the last lesson, misinterpretation results when one reads various allegorical meanings into Scripture. Just because inspired prophecy has not yet been fulfilled does not mean that it cannot yet be fulfilled. One point to remember is that God's timetable does not change for impatient humans who look for other explanations when He does not act as quickly as we think He should act.

A closer look at the views of amellenialists, the postmellennialists, and the **premillennialists** should clarify why there is the high regard for the final position over the others.

Distinguish between the Rapture and the Second Coming.

The Rapture and the Second Coming

The church has been blessed with worship hymns like "We Shall Behold Him" and "In Christ Alone." Whether or not we see Jesus with our physical eyes when He comes to take us to be with Him, either in the Rapture or at death, we will experience His presence in an equally wonderful way. "Seeing Jesus" is a good way to describe that fantastic moment.

Does the phrase “Every eye shall behold Him” refer to the Rapture or the Second Coming?

This glorious occasion is often related to the earlier quote, taken from Revelation 1:7. But the context of the full verse is, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.” Seeing Jesus will bring grief to the ones who see Him then. Rather than speaking of the Rapture, the verse refers to Christ’s return at the end of the Tribulation to bring an end to evil on the earth.

The other two Scripture references that speak of seeing Jesus in the future also speak of the same end-time event. “ ‘Men of Galilee,’ they [the angels] said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’ ” (Acts 1:11). The disciples had seen the resurrected Jesus leave the earth and ascend into heaven. It is only at the Second Coming, at the end of the Tribulation, that Christ again sets foot on planet earth. Matthew 24:30–31 also points to the same event: “Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect [the Jews] from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (KJV).

The term “Second Coming” is often used for the Rapture, but for this study of end-time events, we must make a distinction between the two events: (1) the Rapture when Christ descends from heaven (but does not set foot on the earth) and we are caught up “to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17), and (2) the Second Coming to earth when Christ comes “with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). Paul describes the later event this way: “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8, KJV).

Christ’s Second Coming will be a very visible event. “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:27). So as we continue our study, we will be careful to distinguish between the Rapture and the Second Coming or Second Advent, as it is sometimes called.

Summarize the weaknesses of a postmillennial view of eschatology.

The Basis of Postmillennialism

The terms used in a scholarly study of biblical end-time prophecy can be confusing. There is amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism. Then the terms get more confusing with pre-Tribulation, mid-Tribulation, and post-Tribulation. You will find brief definitions for each of these terms in the glossary at the end of this IST. To give a little help as we begin our detailed study, “A-” as a prefix means “not” or “without.” Hence, **amillennialism** means the denial of a millennium. The prefix “pre-” means “before;” thus, **premillennialism** acknowledges that Christ will come to earth before the Millennium to set up His earthly kingdom of a thousand years. The prefix “post-” means “after” or “behind.” **Postmillennialism** teaches that Christ’s second coming is after the Millennium, which postmillennialists define as the Church Age in which we are now living. Remember from our discussion that the Second Coming is not the Rapture. The Second Coming is Christ’s coming to earth in flaming fire to defeat Satan, Antichrist, and all the forces of evil, seven years after the Rapture. Amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism are extremely important words because they define very different perspectives on biblical prophecy.

Pre-Tribulation, mid-Tribulation, and post-Tribulation describe the timing of the Rapture, whereas the “Millennium” words describe the timing and perspective of the millennial reign of Christ and the Second Coming. One must be a **literalist** first of all to believe in a real “snatching away” of believers when Jesus descends and we meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Some people who believe in a coming Rapture place the event at the beginning of, or before, the seven-year Tribulation. Others believe the Rapture will take place in the middle of the seven years—mid-Tribulation Rapture. Still others believe the Rapture will take place at the end of the Tribulation and is the same as the Second Coming discussed above. We will deal with these Rapture views in a later lesson.

With the terms clarified, we will first consider the least commonly held millennial view of our time: postmillennialism. This view was popular in the 18th and 19th centuries and is based on a non-literal interpretation of prophecy. It advocates claim that Satan was bound at the cross, and the Church Age is the only millennium there will be. With this view, Christ’s kingdom is spiritual and unseen. The gospel will eventually convert the entire world before Christ returns for resurrection of the dead and judgment. In its period of prominence, postmillennialism was the view held by liberals who claimed that human wisdom and scientific technology would bring a perfect society. It was also supported by some religious conservatives who expected the conversion of most or all of the world to Christ, which would end the rule of evil and bring about a perfect or nearly perfect society.

Postmillennialism lost much of its popularity by the middle of the twentieth century. The totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Stalin challenged the expectation of a society gradually becoming perfect. Some more recent appearances of a modified

postmillennialism are found in “Kingdom Now” or “Dominion” teachings. A position paper of the Assemblies of God deals with these recent departures from biblical truth: “The Kingdom of God as Described in Holy Scripture” (AG website at www.ag.org).

Outline the basis of amillennialism.

The Basis of Amillennialism

As we have already noted, amillennialism is based on an allegorical or figurative interpretation of biblical prophecy. Since this interpretation of prophecy began within a few centuries of the death of Jesus, it became the prophecy interpretation of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, both of which retain this position today. The view is held by many liberal Protestant groups and is the most common view of various evangelical reformed groups today.

Amillennialism teaches that the saints of all ages are members of the church. So the church has replaced national Israel under the New Covenant. There is no end-time role for Israel! It therefore applies all the Old Testament prophecies about a restored Israel to the church. Whereas premillennialists consider the 1948 formation of a national Israel in Palestine* a significant event in prophecy, amillennialists claim that the event is irrelevant to God’s end-time plan. But the promises that have yet to be fulfilled cannot be overlooked so easily. Israel will be blessed with peace, prosperity, and its own land, according to the Bible (Leviticus 26:4–12 and reaffirmed in Deuteronomy 28:3–12). Israel will be a great nation, blessed more than all other nations, according to the Bible (Deuteronomy 7:14 and 28:1).

Israel, of course, is expected to listen to and obey the voice of the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:1 and Exodus 19:5). But that obedience is also a part of end-time prophecy. “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land.... They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 37:21, 23). The New Testament confirms what the Old Testament promises: “Israel has experienced a hardening, in part, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25–26). The vast difference between a literal reading and a symbolic interpretation alone here is obvious.

Selective adoption of only portions of the Word of God will always nurture an imbalance in the acceptance of God’s Word and the guide that it is meant to be for the

walk in Biblical faith that every believer is called to. When symbolic interpretation is substituted for a clearly literal statement of Scripture, this would indicate a human choice rather than a divine declaration. Once the principle that prophecy is allegorical or entirely symbolic is accepted, biblical truth about the future is subject to redefinition. Amillennialism is not based on solid study and searching of Scripture for truth. This view is based on using Scripture for purposes that may seem good on the surface, but undermine the whole fabric of Bible belief.

Liberal amillennialism denies such important biblical teachings as resurrection, Rapture and Second Coming, judgment, and eternal punishment. Other followers of this far end of the amillennial view have added purgatory, limbo, and other non-biblical doctrines. As spiritual meaning is declared the literal meaning of inspired Scripture is sacrificed, and eternal truth is lost.

As we conclude this lesson, we need not survey the whole system of premillennialism. Other aspects of premillennialism will be addressed as we proceed through the entire course. In summary, the intent of this chapter has been to affirm that we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that its predictions on end-time prophecy will literally happen. Attempts to explain all prophecy as symbolism or allegory can send us on a path of placing personal opinions and denominational declarations above the inerrant, infallible Word of God. We want to be part of the host of saints that await the return of Jesus for His faithful at the Rapture. With John we say, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20, KJV).

2

A Plan from the Beginning

To fully understand the Bible and its application to our everyday lives, we must know what God's Word says about three things: (1) God's purpose in creating our world, (2) the Fall of the human race and its impact on our world, and (3) God's past and future plan for redeeming a fallen creation. Everything in Scripture relates in some way to one of these three truths.

God created our world and still sustains it today. God existed before the world was spoken into being. Our finite minds have difficulty understanding all the details of what God has been doing since He first created our physical world. And the future of His plan for His creation is in many respects still a mystery that we must watch unfold. The apostle Paul knew he was dealing with the great mystery of the church as part of God's eternal plan when he explained to the Ephesian believers, "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach ... the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things" (Ephesians 3:8–9).

God is a personal God. He has spoken to the world He created through His inspired Word. And He communes personally with those who have accepted His Son Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. The lessons of this chapter will stress the importance of knowing God personally through an understanding of His benevolent plan for those who accept His love, mercy, and salvation.

Lesson 2.1 Creation as the Beginning of God's Plan

Objectives

- 2.1.1 Examine the creation of human beings.*
- 2.1.2 Point out the effect of the Fall on humankind.*
- 2.1.3 Explain God's plan of restoration for His fallen creation.*

Lesson 2.2 The Kingdom of God as Fulfillment of God's Plan

Objectives

- 2.2.1 Examine the kingdom of God as it relates to Israel.*
- 2.2.2 Explain the meaning of the kingdom of God in the New Testament.*
- 2.2.3 Indicate how the fulfillment of prophecy is linked to the full glory of God's kingdom.*

Lesson 2.3 Christ as the Central Figure in End-time Prophecy and the Kingdom of God

Objectives

- 2.3.1 Analyze the prophecy of the Old Testament in relation to Christ's first coming.*
- 2.3.2 Relate Christ's earthly ministry/sacrifice to His rule over God's kingdom.*

2.3.3 Identify the role of Christ in the fulfillment of end-time prophecy.

2.1

Creation as the Beginning of God's Plan

Why did God create our world? Was He not satisfied with the host of angels He had already created? A lifetime of study in the Word of God keeps us growing in our understanding of God's response to such questions. Science struggles with the "when" and "how" questions about the material universe. But only God can answer the "why" questions.

Some people view humans as a higher form of animal life. Others see humans as finely tuned machines with all the mechanical parts working together smoothly. But rather than considering the Creator of the "machine," they unwisely assume that such a machine has been developed randomly through nature's processes over billions of years of time. God's Word describes humans quite differently: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas" (Psalm 8:4–8).

In this lesson, we investigate the biblical view of God's creation and the purposes for which humans are created.

Examine the creation of human beings.

In God's Image

Why did God create the world and the human race?

The Bible tells us that God created the inhabitants of the world for His glory. In fact, God created the world and everyone in it for His glory (Isaiah 43:7). But sin destroyed the

glory of God's original creation, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Was God being self-serving in creating humankind for His glory?

What does it mean to be created in God's image?

Humans are special creations of God. After creating the heavenly bodies, the land, the seas, the vegetation, sea creatures, flying creatures, and land animals, God brought the human into existence: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26–27). Though we imperfectly reflect God's image in this life, we do possess the God-given abilities to think and to make choices just as our creator. As we submit our lives to Christ as our Savior, He develops in us the fruit of the Spirit, which in human form are "images" of the perfect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control of God himself.

Why did God tell Adam and Eve to subdue the perfect world that He had created as *good*?

After creating Adam and Eve in His own image, God gave them a purpose, a reason for living. They were to rule the perfect natural world for God. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground'" (Genesis 1:28).

Point out the effect of the Fall on humankind.

Sin and God's Image

As humanity was originally created, it reflected the character and holiness of God. It did not, of course, become equal with God. But can you imagine what communion with God would have been like if Adam and Eve had not sinned and altered the original image? The innocent and beautiful walks in the Garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8) might also describe what we could be enjoying today. But that wonderful relationship was shattered by the invasion of evil into human life.

How does this story of Creation and the Fall of Adam and Eve relate to our study of end-time prophecy?

Some might argue that believers already, in this life, have a restored relationship with God through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is true that there is nothing in this life to compare with those blessed times of fellowship with God as we yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit and His ministry through us. In comparison with our lives before we surrendered to Christ, the experience of the Spirit-filled life is an earthly connection with heaven. But it still falls short of what God designed for His human creation in the beginning. Evil is still a reality in our world. But our future communion with God will be far beyond anything we experience in this life—just as our life now in Christ surpasses the way we lived before we met our new Master.

The conflict between evil and the holiness of God fills the pages of Scripture from the first chapters of Genesis to the final chapters of Revelation. The beginning of the conflict actually occurs before the failure of Adam and Eve. Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 are understood by some conservative scholars to tell of Satan's rebellion in heaven, which then set the scene for the Genesis account of the Fall. There is obvious mention of the historical kings of Tyre and Babylon. But the chapters include references that seem to go beyond any human counterpart. These words about the king of Tyre appear to fit Satan: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; ... You were anointed as a guardian cherub, ... You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you' (Ezekiel 28:12–15). The strongest support of Satan as the rebellious angelic figure, cast out from the presence of God before the Genesis introduction of the Garden of Eden is based on this passage in Ezekiel, though the Isaiah reference was once held as strongly by many Protestants and most Pentecostals.

In Isaiah 14, the references to the king of Babylon may reach beyond an historical figure to a prideful morning star ("Lucifer" KJV, NKJV). "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, ... You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit

enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High' ” (Isaiah 14:12–14).

If God is all-powerful, why did He not judge Satan immediately, and thus save humankind from the havoc that this “enemy” has created in the world?

As responsible human beings, we are allowed to plan and conduct our personal lives. God is omnipotent and could force every creature to do as He commands. But He has chosen not to treat us as living puppets forced to love Him, whether or not we desire to do so. Our choices, however, have consequences. There were consequences to the free-will choices made by Adam and Eve. And the same is still true today. Yet God controls the ultimate end of the creation He brought into being. God and His righteousness will in the end reign supreme. Those who have by choice accepted God’s terms for salvation and fellowship will reign with Him. That is why the study of end-time prophecy is so important and comforting to believers today.

Explain God’s plan of restoration for His fallen creation.

Plan of Redemption

John 3:16 is the foundational verse for God’s plan of redemption. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Even as the curse and consequences of the first sin were announced, the first hints of God’s plan of redemption were spoken. To the serpent Satan, God said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Who are the offspring of the serpent and of Eve?

God would have been completely justified in condemning Adam and Eve to eternal damnation for their sin against His simple command. But that is contrary to the nature of God. Adam and Eve were included in the truth confirmed in the New Testament. God is patient, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, KJV). That truth about God has never changed. God is waiting to receive the heart that turns in His direction.

The Old Testament prophecies of a coming Messiah who would deliver Israel were fulfilled in Jesus. But the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were disappointed. They were looking for a military leader who would restore Israel as a great nation. They were blind to the fact that Jesus came to earth as part of God’s plan of providing redemption for all people, both Jews and Gentiles.

The last words of Jesus on the Cross were, “It is finished.” Then He “bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). Our redemption had been won! But God’s plan still had things that had to happen to restore God’s creation to the state in which He created it. The victory over Satan and evil was accomplished at the Cross. But the complete fulfillment is still in the future. Bible prophecy of the end-time predicts the conclusion of God’s great plan of redemption. Some Bible scholars and students have forgotten that. Because life seems to go on as it has since the beginning of creation (2 Peter 3:4), some Bible scholars and students have concluded that biblical end-time prophecy has not and will not be fulfilled in history. They fail to make allowance for God’s divine patience in fulfilling His plan, considering that with the Lord a thousand years are like one day (2 Peter 3:8).

It is our joy and responsibility to find our place in God’s plan. There are souls to be reached with the good news. The more we understand the awesome events of the future, the harder we should work on the thing closest to the heart of God—bringing lost men and women to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission to His followers, we are a vital part of God’s wonderful plan!

2.2

The Kingdom of God as Fulfillment of God’s Plan

When did the kingdom of God start? What is it now? What will it be? These are some of our most common questions asked by contemporary students of the Bible. But Jesus, who spoke of this Kingdom, nowhere in the Gospels gives a definition. Even more surprising is the fact that no one, neither a disciple nor a Jewish leader, asked Jesus what He meant by the term. Did each audience have its own indigenous understanding of the term *kingdom*? Or was there a commonly understood meaning known by all?

Clearly there were mixed perceptions of it. The Jewish leaders were expecting a political kingdom, one in which Messiah would break the oppression of Roman power at the time. The disciples may have had a similar expectation until Jesus told them of things that would happen, including the destruction of the temple (Matthew 24:2). The only question the disciples asked concerning this was, “When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). Through Jesus’ teaching, their understanding of the Kingdom was being adjusted.

Some Bible scholars have tried to make a distinction between the “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of heaven.” But an in-depth study proves beyond question that the Bible uses the terms to refer to the same thing. Matthew, the only Gospel writer to use “kingdom of heaven,” uses both terms interchangeably (Matthew 19:23–24). Also, Jews, to whom Matthew’s Gospel was addressed, often used “heaven” as a substitute word for “God” (YHWH), whose name was considered too holy to use.

Examine the kingdom of God as it relates to Israel.

Israel and the Kingdom of God

In the Old Testament, there are two references to “the kingdom of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 28:5 and 2 Chronicles 13:8), but they do not refer to the kingdom of God as presented in the New Testament. They refer to Solomon and David’s descendants ruling over “the kingdom of the LORD over Israel” (1 Chronicles 28:5). Yet many of the prophetic passages announce a future day when God will reign supreme and include Israel in a specially reserved spot in that future Kingdom.

Without question, Israel played an important role in the coming of the Kingdom, and will play a significant role in the future of the kingdom of God. “The more inclusive message [of the Old Testament] is to reveal how God sovereignly chose to prepare and use Israel as his unique mediatorial agent. He unfolded his kingdom plan on behalf of all races, nations, peoples, and ethnic groups” (Van Groningen 1996, 379).

The universal blessing that would come through Israel was emphasized and re-emphasized in the covenant promises God made with the patriarchs of Israel. To Abraham, God promised, “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth” (Genesis 13:16), “I will make you into a great nation ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2–3). And the most important of the promises is: “I will ... be your God and the God of your descendants” (Genesis 17:7). On more than one occasion, God repeated these promises to Abraham.

But the promises did not stop there. To Moses, God said, “ ‘Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites’ ” (Exodus 19:5–6; See also Deuteronomy 5:2–5, 7:6–10, and 10:15–17). Israel as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” was not the same as the New Testament “kingdom of God,” but God’s chosen nation foreshadows the coming Kingdom. For example, the Israelites were the people of God, called to live under God’s rule, and Christians today are people of God called to live under God’s rule. Israel was to be God’s witness to their world, and Christians today are God’s witnesses to our world.

The promise that Israel was to be God’s chosen nation was repeated to King David. Without any conditions attached to the promises, God, through the prophet Nathan, told David He would make his name great, establish the kingdom under his son Solomon, and make David’s descendants rulers over a kingdom that would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:4–17). David’s humble response to God’s promise (2 Samuel 7:18–29) should be read carefully by any who seek God’s greatest blessing on their lives and ministry. As a nation and a people, Israel still has a national and ethnic identity today. God has been faithful to Israel!

Explain the meaning of the kingdom of God in the New Testament.

The New Testament Church and the Kingdom of God

The promise made to King David, that “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me” (2 Samuel 7:16) has raised questions for some Bible students. For nearly 1,900 years, Israel was scattered among the nations. Only in the last century has Israel become a recognized nation again. And the leaders of Israel today are hardly identifiable as descendants of David’s kingly line. But God knew what He was saying when He made the prophetic statement. Rather than an earthly dynasty of kings, God’s promise to David finds its fulfillment in Christ.

The New Testament, the expression of the New Covenant, describes Joseph as belonging “to the house and line of David” (Luke 2:4). The very first verse of the New Testament establishes Jesus Christ as “the son of David” (Matthew 1:1). Throughout the Gospels Jesus is passionately called the Son of David. The mother of a demon-possessed daughter cried out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Matthew 15:22). Two blind men beside the road, when told to be quiet, shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David,

have mercy on us!” (Matthew 20:31). And at Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the crowds shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matthew 21:9). The promise made to David, “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16) is fulfilled in Christ.

Who are the “people of God” mentioned twice in the Old Testament (Judges 20:2; 2 Samuel 14:13), and three times in the New Testament (Hebrews 4:9; 11:25; and 1 Peter 2:10)?

From the first pages of Holy Scripture there have been two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil. In the New Testament the kingdom of God comes into full prominence. Jesus began His earthly ministry by proclaiming, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). That announcement was directed to Israel, but the Jews rejected Him and the kingdom He was bringing to them. Jesus was equally responsive to their lack of acceptance: “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matthew 21:43); and the more worthy ones would be those, Jews and Gentiles, who accepted Christ, the Son of God, as their personal Savior.

Just as at the beginning, the Kingdom is still not a geographic location. It exists in the hearts of those who make Christ the King of their lives by accepting His great sacrifice for their salvation. Those who have not made this commitment do not understand the reality of the Kingdom. The Assemblies of God position paper, “The Kingdom of God as Described in Holy Scripture,” summarizes the state of the Kingdom with these words: When the Pharisees asked Jesus at what time the kingdom of God would come, he answered, “The kingdom of God is within [among] you” (Luke 17:21). The restored reign of God was soon to be a reality, for the One who was to reclaim the usurped territory was on earth to accomplish His work of redemption. The overthrow of Satan’s dominion had already begun. Today, the redemptive work is complete, yet the reality of the ultimate Kingdom is qualified. In the present age, the power of the Kingdom does not halt the aging or death process. Though God does overrule natural laws by sovereign act(s) or in response to the prayer and faith of believers, the Kingdom still works through fallible human beings. The church will not finally change the world prior to the Second Coming. Righteous political and social actions are important, but the main thrust of the Kingdom is the spiritual transformation of individuals who make up the body of Christ. The millennium and the ultimate expression of the Kingdom will not come without the physical return of Jesus Christ to the earth (Luke 21:31). The Kingdom is already present, but not yet complete. It is both present and future. (Assemblies of God Position Paper 2003)

In recent decades, false teachings about the kingdom of God have misled some believers. “Dominion Theology” as well as its offshoot “Kingdom Now” teaching maintains that the church will permeate and take over world government, education, the arts and sciences, the financial systems—in fact, every aspect of human life—until the world is completely subject to God’s dominion. Then, and only then, will Christ come back to earth to rule and reign over a perfect world prepared for His return.

These overly optimistic postmillennial teachings tend to lose their appeal whenever the world situation becomes unsettled and dangerous. But great advances in the spread of the gospel can cause these teachings to gain greater prominence. A major difficulty for *dominion theology* and *kingdom now* teachings has been the prophetic passages in Scripture which point to an increase of evil in the world as the end approaches.

In recent years another teaching called “Reconstructionism,” which is neo-Calvinistic, has entered the postmillennial arena. Known as “Theonomy” or “Christian Reconstructionism,” this teaching claims that the goal of the church is establishing a theocratic rule of God upon the earth. They do this by proposing the establishment of the Old Testament civil and moral law in society along with the teachings of the New Testament. They claim, incorrectly, that God wants to exercise dominion through His church by establishing Old Testament civil and moral law as the law of the land.

Indicate how the fulfillment of prophecy is linked to the full glory of God’s kingdom.

End-time Events: The Full Glory of the Kingdom

Israel’s rejection cannot thwart the many promises God has made to His chosen nation. Nor do the trials and tribulations believers experience in this sin-cursed world compare to the glory that awaits the coming of the kingdom of God when Satan and his evil cohorts are defeated and eternally bound. The Gentile nations, alongside a restored Israel, will enjoy God’s blessing under the sovereignty of Christ. The millennial Kingdom and the events beyond it will truly be the fulfillment of God’s plan from the dawn of Creation. The end-time events leading up to and during the millennial kingdom, along with the eternity beyond the Millennium—the ultimate fulfillment of God’s plan from the dawn of creation—is the subject of our study in this course.

No matter what you are facing in life today, let the glory of the future Kingdom bless and encourage your efforts to carry the gospel to those who are not yet citizens of the kingdom of God. God is faithful. His promises in Christ are yea and amen “unto the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 1:18, KJV). Or as it is expressed in the *New International Version*,

“No matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

2.3

Christ as the Central Figure in End-time Prophecy and the Kingdom of God

The study of Bible prophecy has sometimes been caught up in interpreting current conflicts between nations (wars and rumors of war), natural disasters (earthquakes, famine, tsunamis), and threats of nuclear destruction. However, we must remember that the study of end-time prophecy should have as its focus the central figure of prophecy, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the central figure of the Bible, the world’s most influential book, and it clearly describes the magnificent Person of Jesus as a member of two worlds: our natural world and the divine world from which He came. “In the past God spoke ... through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:1–3).

But Christ’s surpassing excellence is even greater in the future. God has “made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:9–10).

This description of Christ is awesome, yet, unlike the great mythical gods of other religions, Jesus wants to be closer than the closest family member. Paul, writing to the Philippian believers, told them how they should relate to each other in their spiritual family relationships. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:5–9).

Do not let many details of end-time prophecy take your mind off your friendship and relationship with this incomparable Christ. He loves each of us so much that He left His glorious abode, came down to live as one of us, and to die that we might be set free from the bondage of sin. What a wonderful, wonderful Savior!

Analyze the prophecy of the Old Testament in relation to Christ's first coming.

Announcement of Old Testament Prophets

What does the biblical statement, “Jesus is the Christ,” mean?

The number of Old Testament prophecies about a coming Messiah who would deliver Israel from her enemies and provide salvation for all who put their trust in Him total more than seventy relating to His first coming and over forty pointing to His end-time role (Payne 1973, 665–668). The only prophecies most Jews saw were those proclaiming that Messiah would be the mighty leader who would bring Israel to prominence among the nations. They failed to see the spiritual ministry of the coming Messiah. So the early church preached and taught that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah for whom they were looking. They believed Jesus was that Messiah, even though He did not set up an earthly Kingdom when He came as a babe and lived, and eventually ministered among them. The prophecies of a great earthly Kingdom were for a later time, which is still to come for today's believers.

John concludes his Gospel this way: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not recorded in this book. But these have been recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ [or Messiah], the Son of God, and so that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30–31). As a new Christian, Paul preached the same message, “But Saul grew more and more powerful and continued to confound the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this man [Jesus] was the Christ” (Acts 9:22; see also Acts 5:42).

Though we look to what will come, noting some major prophecies about Jesus' coming to earth to die for our sins—prophecies already fulfilled—gives validity to the prophecies not yet fulfilled and their accuracy. On the next page is a brief summary of key prophecies about Jesus. Notice the length of time before each prophecy was actually fulfilled.

Event in Life of Christ	Prophet or OT Book	Year Before Christ
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Birth of Jesus	Micah 5:2, 4–5	c. 700 BC
Triumphal Entry	Zechariah 9:9	c. 500 BC
Betrayal of Jesus	Zechariah 11:12–13	c. 500 BC
Passion of Christ	Psalms 22:14–18	c. 1000 BC
Christ's Suffering and Ministry	Isaiah 53:4–7, 9, 11–12	c. 700 BC
Death of Christ	Zechariah 12:10	c. 500 BC

Relate Christ's earthly ministry/sacrifice to His rule over God's kingdom.

Christ's Earthly Ministry and Sacrifice

The same Jesus who physically walked on earth for more than thirty years is recognized by Scripture as a Prophet, a Priest, a King, and a divine Sacrifice for our salvation.

Jesus Christ, the Prophet

Since the plan of salvation is given to us in the New Testament, why do we need the Old Testament in our Bibles?

Moses told the Israelites, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Stephen pointed out that Jesus was the one Moses spoke about (Acts 7:37). Jesus fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy about His earthly life, while He spoke more prophecies about the future than any other prophet in either Testament.

Jesus Christ, the High Priest

King David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, spoke prophetically that, “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’ ” (Psalm 110:4). The fulfillment of that prophecy is the theme of the book of Hebrews. Christ is the High Priest “in the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17). “Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26). Unlike the high priests of Israel, who offered animal sacrifices for the sins of the people, our faithful High Priest gave himself as a holy sacrifice once for our sins. Read the many “Christ as High Priest” passages of Hebrews (2:17, 3:1, 4:14–15, 5:5, 8:1, 9:11, and 10:21).

Jesus Christ, the King of kings

In the details of end-time prophecy, Christ as King is His most important office. Christ today should be King in the hearts of all believers. But the perfect fulfillment of Christ’s kingly role will begin with His return to earth with all the saints to defeat the forces of Satan and Antichrist at Armageddon. Christ will then reign on earth as King during the Millennium in fulfillment of the promise made to King David.

Jesus Christ, the Once-for-All Sacrifice

Hebrews 7:27–28 explains it perfectly. “Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.” Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan! Oh, the grace that brought it down to man! Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!

Identify the role of Christ in the fulfillment of end-time prophecy.

Central Figure in End-time Events

Let this preliminary overview help you keep in mind, throughout the entire course, the important role of Christ in the events that lie ahead.

- In the Rapture, Christ catches away those who have accepted Him as personal Savior and await His coming.
- In the Tribulation, Christ overcomes the evil activity of Satan and Antichrist.
- At the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, Christ is forever united to the righteous ones who have joined Him after the Rapture and the resurrection of the righteous dead.

- In the Millennium, Christ is King over the entire world. His Kingdom is a peaceful and righteous society.
- In the New Jerusalem, Christ, the Lamb, is the lamp that lights the city. This is the plan for an eternity of His blessed presence!

3

The Believer's Afterlife Between Death and the Rapture

Believers in the early church were focused on Christ's soon return. But as believers one-by-one were martyred or died a natural death, they were forced to re-examine their understanding of what Jesus had really said to them. When would Jesus return, and how

would this impact those who were still living? How would it impact those who had already died?

Even in the short time after Jesus' ascension into heaven, skeptics began to scoff at the Christian teaching concerning Christ's return. "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4). Today, skeptics describe Bible prophecy as mythology, or fairy tales that will never actually happen.

How do we respond to such criticisms? First and foremost, God himself will answer for the fulfillment of His Word. We can rest assured of that fact. God is patient concerning the fulfillment of his Word, not wanting any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Also, uncertainties about the future have not been diminished by advances in technology or science. People in this world will acknowledge the uncertainty and frailty of life on planet earth. No one knows for certain when he or she will die. But the follower of Christ has a solid hope. Even as we anticipate the redemption that is drawing near (Luke 21:28), we acknowledge that this present life will end in one of two ways. Either Jesus comes to take believers to be with Him forever, or we will die and go to be with the Lord. Either way, we are with the Lord forever. That is an assurance that people need to know about. After this physical life is ended, existence in a new realm of the spirit begins, and that afterlife will be the focus of this chapter.

Lesson 3.1 Death for the Believer

Objectives

3.1.1 Identify the effect of sin on God's creation.

3.1.2 Explain what the believer's attitude toward the inevitability of death should be.

Lesson 3.2 The Place of the Afterlife

Objectives

3.2.1 Give reasons for the belief that Old Testament saints did not go to Sheol after death.

3.2.2 Explain the rewards of death for the believer.

3.2.3 Identify the eternal resting places reserved for the wicked.

Lesson 3.3 Resurrection of Deceased Believers at the Rapture

Objectives

3.3.1 Describe the resurrection of those who die without Christ.

3.3.2 Indicate when and where believers are judged.

3.3.3 Explain the nature of the believer's resurrected body.

3.1

Death for the Believer

Even though we are aware that death awaits us, it still can arouse a profound sense of unsettledness for humanity. For the believer, the only alternative to death is the Rapture—when we meet the Lord in the air.

Some people refuse to think about dying, just as they refuse to think about giving their lives to God for salvation provided by Jesus Christ. But the person who puts off giving his or her life to Christ has, in so doing, made a decision to reject Christ as Savior. Scripture states plainly, “Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). After death, it will be too late. This makes it all the more important to understand the believer’s view of death.

Identify the effect of sin on God’s creation.

The Result of Sin

When a person dies, what happens to the body and soul?

As we have noted, Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. Though aspects of that image remain, it was marred in every subsequent human born because of the sin of Adam and Eve. There is a dark side to all humans until they come to Christ and let Him change their lives. Even then, our lives are a constant struggle against the flesh and Satan, the enemy of our souls.

The Fall of the human race is the backdrop for our understanding of death. Even though death entered our world through the Fall, God is still the “fountain [source] of life” (Psalm 36:9). “In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:10). The concept of death entered the human race when God told Adam, “When you eat of it [the tree of knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17). Adam and Eve were not immediately struck dead when they disobeyed, but the eventual fate of physical death became a reality. “For dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19).

The New Testament repeats the death penalty. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Since the Fall, “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). We can only imagine what life would be on earth if Adam and Eve had not sinned!

Explain what the believer’s attitude toward the inevitability of death should be.

No Fear for the Believer

One man’s death brought victory over human death. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Paul tells Timothy, with a triumphant proclamation, “Our Savior, Christ Jesus, ... has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality” (2 Timothy 1:10). There is good reason why Christians need not fear death. Physical death is not the end; it is just the beginning of the glory God has planned for His children.

Though death is God’s punishment for humankind’s disobedience, there is a death much worse than physical death. That is spiritual death that leads to eternal punishment for refusing God’s offer of salvation. Jesus himself said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). For those who believe only in physical death, the prospect of dying means the end of everything. Those who lead a meaningless life may welcome an end to earthly life.

How does our life on earth affect our desire to see Jesus and live with Him forever?

Some sinners have come to live comfortably, like the rich man in Jesus’ parable, who said to himself, “What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.... This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods” (Luke 12:17–18). But just as he decided to take life easy, God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (12:20). For those who have laid up their treasure on this earth, death is unwelcome, an abrupt end to pleasures and plans. Even though they profess not to fear death, they hate its arrival.

In what way is death a gain, rather than a loss, for the believer?

When our treasure is laid up in heaven, there is no sting in death. Like Paul, we can shout in the face of death, “Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death simply unites the believer with the treasures he or she has sent on ahead. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21, Luke 12:34). The walk through the gate of death is a triumphal entry for the true believer.

Some people become disheartened when they ask God for healing, but death still comes. Some saints have actually anticipated or welcomed death for the spiritual gains it provides. Paul says with clarity, “I ... would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:8–10). Until we see death as the beginning of greater things, rather than the end of things, we cannot grasp Paul’s statement that “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). If Christ and His call is first in this life, then dying will be great gain for the true believer.

Our view of and attitude toward death might well be compared to Christ’s attitude toward His death. Do we feel we do not deserve to die? Do we think of death as a terrible joke played on good people? Did Christ have our attitude toward death? Paul addresses this in his letter to the Philippians:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5–8)

Of course, Jesus knew that He would rise again and be restored to His rightful place. But did that make His death any less painful to bear?

Would it not be wonderful if you could enter into glories of heaven and face-to-face communion with Jesus without dying? But think about it. Some who are alive today may go into Christ’s presence through the Rapture, bypassing the temporary pain or intimidation of death. There is also the very real possibility that we will meet the Lord at death, after many years of service. The writer of this course was born several years before World War II. Unless Jesus comes in the next few years, he is likely to meet Jesus through death rather than the Rapture. As a student studying this course for more effective service to Christ and His kingdom, you may have many years left to share the gospel with those

who have never given Christ a place in their hearts. Until our service is ended, we must press on faithfully, drawing ever closer to the One who will welcome us at death *or* in the Rapture.

Paul has a message from God for each of us as we await Christ's coming or leave this dead body in a grave to await its resurrection. "Therefore, my dear brothers [and sisters], stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). We shall see our King—one way or the other. Make the most of the remaining time!

<h2>3.2</h2>	<h3>The Place of the Afterlife</h3>
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You may already have discovered that different groups hold various views on life after death. The body goes into the grave awaiting the resurrection of the righteous dead at the Rapture or the resurrection of the wicked for their final judgment at the **Great White Throne Judgment**. But there are a few non-biblical teachings you may encounter in your ministry.

Because they do not believe that God exists, atheists teach that all life ends when the body dies. For them, the material world is all that exists. Humans are just intelligent beings without any moral nature.

Some theologians teach **universalism**, the belief that all persons will in the end receive salvation. They reason that if God so loved the world that He sent His Son to die (John 3:16), then the entire world will be saved.

Some pagan religions believe in the **reincarnation** of souls, or the passing of the human soul at death into a new body, either human or animal. Some who hold this belief teach that animals should not be killed because a human soul may reside in that body. Though this belief affirms the concept of life after physical death, the idea of reincarnation has no foundation in Holy Scripture.

Some belief systems teach that the soul sleeps or is in a state of unconsciousness after physical death until the time it is awakened at a resurrection. This **soul sleep** teaching is sometimes pushed to the extreme, in that there is the claim that the soul goes out of existence and is replaced by a new soul at the resurrection. This false teaching is built on biblical comparisons of death to "sleeping." Paul uses sleep imagery in 1 Corinthians 15:6, 18, 20, 51 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–15, 5:10. But in each case, sleep is used as a symbolic image for death.

One of the largest denominations holds to the teaching that at death humans pass into **purgatory**, or a state of suffering until they are purged of past sin. Prayers of intercession

by living friends and family, or by priests who pray on behalf of the church, contribute to the release of such souls.

There are likely other non-biblical views of what happens after physical human death, but these are the ones most likely to be encountered.

Give reasons for the belief that Old Testament saints did not go to Sheol after death.

Old Testament Saints and Sheol

What is Sheol and where is it located?

Because the Bible does not record in great detail what actually happens to the believer's soul at death, it is easy to build a questionable belief based on brief references. As Jesus told of the deaths of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, He said, "the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried" (Luke 16:22). But there are no Old Testament references to angels escorting the faithful to heaven, or even to "Abraham's side." So, in order to form a basis for your position on this matter, it is necessary to trace the concept of the afterlife through both the Old and New Testaments.

The Hebrew word ***Sheol*** is not found in the New International version, though an interpreted term is included. The KJV translates the Sheol as "hell" thirty-one times, as "grave" thirty-one times, and as "pit" three times (Morey 1984, 74). The New International Version usually translates Sheol as "grave." Because of questions about the exact meaning of Sheol, many modern translations simply use the Hebrew word Sheol, rather than "grave" or "pit."

In the Old Testament, Sheol is described as the place where the wicked go at death. Even though some respected translators render Sheol as "grave," Stanley Horton, renowned Pentecostal Biblical scholar and author, points out that the word should not always be translated "grave." "When the Bible speaks of graves in an unmistakable way, as when the Israelites asked Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?' (Exodus 14:11), another word, *qever*, is normally used. When Jacob thought Joseph was torn to pieces and obviously not in a grave, Jacob still thought he was in Sheol (Genesis 37:35)" (Horton 1996, 44).

The Old Testament does not state specifically where the righteous dead do go when they die. At death, an Israelite patriarch left the world of the living and was “gathered to his people” (Genesis 25:8, 25:17, 35:29, 49:33; Numbers 20:24, 20:26). Some commentaries describe Sheol as a two-compartment location in the depths of the earth. One section is for the righteous dead and the other for the wicked dead. This view draws on Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), where there is conversation between the rich man in the fires of **Hades** (Greek translation of Hebrew Sheol) and Lazarus at Abraham’s side, with an uncrossable “great chasm” between them. Some go a step further and speculate that during the three days between His crucifixion and resurrection Jesus went down to Sheol and led the righteous from their compartment to a heavenly home. They draw this conclusion from Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8, which both speak of leading “captivity captive.” But Horton (1996) maintains there is no biblical evidence for a two-compartment Sheol. Instead, the souls of Old Testament saints went at death into God’s presence. Several biblical references support this interpretation (44–52).

1. David’s expected to “dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6).
2. The wicked are headed for Sheol, but God will redeem the psalmist from Sheol and take him into His presence (Psalm 49:14–15, where “grave” is actually Sheol in the original Hebrew).
3. Sheol is described as a place of punishment for the wicked in numerous Old Testament passages.
4. When the rich man “looked up and saw Abraham” (Luke 16:23), it was to heaven, rather than to another compartment of Sheol.
5. When the New Testament quotes Old Testament passages mentioning Sheol, the Greek word is Hades, a place of punishment for the wicked.

Explain the rewards of death for the believer.

Home with the Lord

What does the New Testament teach about the destiny of believers after death?

The thief on a cross beside Jesus heard these words, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). There would be no waiting in purgatory to make him worthy of being with Jesus. Furthermore, Paul affirms that the righteous at death are immediately “at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

There is no ambiguity in the New Testament as there is for some scholars in the Old Testament Sheol. Sheol is translated as Hades whenever reference is made to Old Testament passages containing the word Sheol. But there is another word that appears in the New Testament relating to the punishment of the wicked. The Greek word *Gehenna* is appropriately translated “hell” in most versions. Gehenna, however, refers to the everlasting lake of fire mentioned in Revelation 19 and 20, rather than the temporary abode of the wicked awaiting their final judgment (Sheol or Hades).

The origin of the word Gehenna is significant. It is the Aramaic name for the narrow Valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem to the west and south. By the time of Jesus (who uses the word Gehenna eleven times in the book of Matthew), the valley had become a city dump, with fires burning all the time—a powerful image for the eternal punishment in the lake of fire. But our focus here is on the believer’s being at home with the Lord!

Though death is the sinner’s penalty for rebellion against God, death is promotion day for the believer. A minister was once asked how he could believe in life after death. Without hesitation, he likened it to a baby’s passing from its mother’s womb into this world. Suppose someone were to tell the unborn baby, “You cannot stay in the womb much longer. You will soon have to leave and go to the real world.” Although the baby cannot articulate feelings, he or she might prefer to stay in the warmth and comfort of the womb.

But as nature takes its course, the baby is born and soon feels love and protection in the protective arms of his or her mother. The years pass: childhood, youth, romance, marriage, children, a productive career, retirement, and the pains of old age. Then this aged adult is forced to face the inevitability of death. But he or she does not want to die; life has been good. However, just as this person was born without choice, he or she dies without choice. Moments after death, this person—if saved—will find himself or herself in the arms of a loving heavenly Father. The new life will far outshine the old life on earth.

Identify the eternal resting places reserved for the wicked.

Two Eternal Destinies

What two biblical characters left this life without dying?

Except for Enoch (Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5), Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), and believers who will be taken up in the Rapture, all humans must die. It is interesting to note that the only ones who will ever avoid death are those ready for the Rapture. But what happens to those not prepared for death or the coming Rapture?

We have already looked at the places prepared for the punishment of the wicked: Sheol, Hades, Gehenna, Hell, and the Lake of Fire. But how does the Bible describe the terrible experience that awaits the sinner in each of these places of punishment?

The final destiny of the lost is intense darkness and eternal fire. Our finite minds cannot comprehend how darkness and fire can exist together. Yet there is nothing that strikes terror to the heart more than darkness that cannot be penetrated or fire that cannot be extinguished. Horton (1996) summarizes it this way: “In that darkness there will be ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ That is, there will be frustration and remorse as the lost continually suffer the wrath of God and as they think of all the sin and wrong in a life that could have been blessed of God but was wasted by their own choices.... The lake of fire will also be a lonely place, [and] terrible place, shut off eternally from fellowship with God” (229, 231). We do not know how the degrees of punishments may vary in the **intermediate state** of the wicked before the eternal Lake of Fire, but darkness and fire seem to characterize all the scenes of eternal punishment in Scripture.

No human in his or her right mind likes to see people suffer pain that never lets up. The sufferings of war and natural disaster are hard to observe, let alone to experience. Yet there have been tyrants who are willing to cause death and intense suffering to satisfy their own ambitious desires. God is not such a tyrant. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). But He is also a God of justice, who will eventually pour out His wrath on sin and evil. When humans persist in defying His loving sacrifice for their salvation, they are at the same time making a choice in preference of the penalty of rejection of the Savior. The message is clear. Accept what a God of love has provided for the human race, or identify with sin and evil and experience the severe consequences. May God help each of us to carry the good news to a lost and dying world!

3.3

Resurrection of Deceased Believers at the Rapture

Many people are puzzled by the tragedies and inequities of life. They question that if God is a God of love, why does He let such things happen. Christians often suffer or they are mistreated while sinners prosper physically, socially, monetarily, and many times by taking advantage of others.

How does Scripture answer human questions about what seems unfair in life?

The future resurrection of all who have died provides the most complete answer to that question. Complete justice will prevail when the deceased are resurrected to face their punishment for wrongdoing or to receive their rewards for being faithful even though not materially blessed in this life. The faithful righteous are rewarded in the end, and the proud wicked lose what they think they had—all because there is a coming resurrection for every person who has ever lived.

We do not have to look far to see those who ignore God and still prosper as they take advantage of others, including the righteous. Centuries ago, the psalmist described why we should not be perplexed by such obvious injustices: “Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him [into Sheol]. Though while he lived he counted himself blessed—and men praise you when you prosper—he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life” (Psalm 49:16–19). Is God just? Would you rather have prosperity now without God, or difficulty now but eternal blessing with God in the future? It is true that God can bless our lives now, but He does not promise us wealth and material prosperity. Some wrongly teach that we can have anything we want in material possessions just by naming what we desire and claiming it. God is faithful; He knows what is best for us. His word cautions us not to set our hopes on the abundance of material possessions. “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36–37). God will correct all injustices after He resurrects both saints and sinners.

Describe the resurrection of those who die without Christ.

Resurrection of the Wicked

The judgment of the wicked at the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the Millennium will be treated in greater detail later. But the question to address here is the

timing that the Scripture teaches of and that comes so much later than the resurrection of the saints.

When are the wicked dead resurrected?

God's end-time plan demonstrates careful purpose resulting in the final victory of righteousness. During the Tribulation, God deals with the living manifestation of evil in both the physical and spirit worlds. The saints, through the Rapture, are delivered from the horrendous plagues and devastation by which Satan, Antichrist, and the forces of evil are defeated. With believers translated out of this devastation, the consummation of evil on earth can be dealt with effectively. There is no reason to resurrect the wicked who have died over the centuries. Their eternal destiny has already been determined on the basis of their past earthly lives. But there is no better time for the resurrection of the deceased saints. Their resurrection precedes the Rapture of the living saints by only the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:50). However, the wicked dead remain in Sheol for an additional 1,000 years, where they are suffering even before their final destiny is pronounced.

How will the resurrected bodies of the wicked compare with those of the resurrected saints?

Why should the bodies of the resurrected wicked have any similarity to the bodies of resurrected saints? Because both must be prepared for the eternal existence—the saints to live forever in God's presence and the wicked to experience everlasting pain and punishment. Finite human minds are sometimes disturbed by the concept of eternal punishment. But God is more than a soft-hearted baby-sitter who allows any kind of behavior. This God of love is also the God of justice and righteousness. (See a position paper of the Assemblies of God, "Eternal Punishment" in booklet form, or on the Internet website at www.ag.org. Enter "Eternal Punishment" in the search box.)

Indicate when and where believers are judged.

Judgment of Believers

If a professing Christian is raptured when the trumpet sounds, we know he or she has been judged righteous. The Judgment Seat of Christ, which will be studied in detail later, is not a judgment of where the believer will spend eternity, but rather a judgment of the works done on earth. Rewards there will be given according to the deeds in this life. Christ judges and forgives a person at salvation. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The actual judgment takes place at the moment of salvation. Of course, salvation can be lost, through carelessness or rebellion. But at death or at the Rapture, one’s eternal destiny is permanently settled.

What will the resurrected bodies of the departed saints be like?

Although the wicked who have refused God’s offer of restored fellowship are not resurrected until after the Millennium, saints who have died before the Rapture are resurrected just before the living saints meet the Lord in the air. Scripture describes this crowning day for believers, both living and dead this way: “According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.... the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17–18). What a day that will be!

Many Christians do not fully understand the nature of the believers’ resurrected bodies. For many, it is simply “coming back to life.” In Jesus earthly ministry, the dead were brought back to life. Three instances are recorded: the ruler’s daughter (Matthew 9:18–25), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–15), and Lazarus (John 11:1–44). But these are not called resurrections in Scripture. They simply restored human life that still ended in physical death. As described in Scripture, resurrection is coming to life in a superior condition. The fact that resurrection is more than restored breathing of a human body is seen in a simple statement of Jesus to the Sadducees, who did not believe in any kind of resurrection. “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:29–30).

First Corinthians 15 is the resurrection chapter. It begins with the resurrection of Christ (vv. 1–11), addresses the resurrection of the dead (vv. 12–34), and concludes with the nature of the resurrection body (vv. 35–58). John alludes to the glory of the resurrected body believers will have: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be

has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

Explain the nature of the believer’s resurrected body.

The Believer’s Resurrected Body

Our resurrected bodies will not be entirely different from what they are today. The nature of Jesus’ resurrected body suggests what our bodies will be like. The identity will be maintained. Recall that the disciples recognized Jesus after His resurrection. The natural body, however, dies, is buried, and perishes. Paul said it perfectly: “We will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’ ” (1 Corinthians 15:52–54). The resurrected bodies, both of the saints and of the sinners, will never perish.

The truth of Christ’s resurrection is the guarantee that we, as His followers, will also experience a change from our present mortal, corruptible bodies to incorruptible bodies that will live forever. The intent of God’s original creation—that Adam and Eve would live forever—will be restored. As we celebrate Easter each year, reflecting on Christ’s victory over death, the grave, and evil, we also celebrate what we shall one day be, as we live eternally in His presence.

We seldom think of our own future resurrection as we contemplate the act of water baptism. Paul describes it this way: You were buried with him [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead (Colossians 2:12). The next time you watch a new convert being baptized in water, remember that the coming up out of the water after immersion is testimony of Christ’s resurrection and of the resurrection all believers will experience if the Rapture does not come before death. Resurrection Day will be the greatest day we have ever known!

Unit 2	The Rapture and the Second Coming
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What items are on your daily prayer list? Do they go beyond the latest family crisis? Or the terrible tragedies we hear in the news? What did Jesus pray about? Should our prayers echo His prayers?

Although prayer should include worship, confession, and thanksgiving, we more often think of it as petition, or asking God to work in some special way. No matter what petitions are on your prayer list, there should always be an expression of desire that God's will and plan be accomplished in the world and in our personal lives. The prayers of Jesus fit this

pattern perfectly. He uttered no greater prayer than when He said to the Father at His hour of great trial, “Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42, NKJV). The “nevertheless” follows the first part of the prayer, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me.”

We should include on our prayer list the fulfillment of God’s plan for His creation, for His church, and for each individual. We looked at God’s plan for His fallen creation in the last unit. We may not know all that God is doing in our world today, but there is one thing we can do, we can pray as John prayed at the end of Revelation. In response to Jesus’ promise of His soon return, John prayed, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

What we pray for most announces our priorities. We must be concerned about our families and our careers or ministries. God expects us to plan and work faithfully at whatever tasks we are given. But at the same time we must never forget that God has placed us on earth to be part of His great plan of the ages. There is no greater prayer than, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Is *Come, Lord Jesus* another dimension of your daily prayer life? Are you praying for people to be made ready for the Lord’s return? Living in expectation of the Lord’s return has a purifying impact on us as followers of Christ, and recalibrates our life and ministry priorities.

Chapter 4 Looking Forward through the Old and New Testaments

Lessons

- C4.1 The Covenants of the Old Testament
- C4.2 The New Covenant through Christ

Chapter 5 The Two Meanings of Christ’s Second Coming

Lessons

- C5.1 The Rapture of the Church
- C5.2 The Holy Spirit’s Role
- C5.3 The Second Advent
- C5.4 Raptured Believers Between the Rapture and Second Advent

Chapter 6 Living in Expectation of Christ’s Coming

Lessons

- C6.1 Anticipating Christ’s Return
- C6.2 Purposeful Labor

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A covenant today is generally an agreement between equal individuals or groups. They seal their agreement by an oath, a handshake, or most often by a written confirmation. Both parties acknowledge privileges and responsibilities. The covenants of the Bible, however, are different. God and the early patriarchs, as well as the nation of Israel, were in no way equals. A covenant between divinity and humanity was something new. God initiated the covenants and determined their terms. Once a covenant was made by God, it was not to be altered or renegotiated.

Though the term *covenant* is not used in the creation account, there is no question that God created human life with expectations it was to meet. Hosea, however, saw a covenant in God's creation as he compared Israel's unfaithfulness to Adam's disobedience: "Like Adam, they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me there" (Hosea 6:7).

As we look at the covenants of the Old Testament, we will again see God's plan of restored fellowship with wayward humanity. In the progression from one covenant to the next, one never loses sight of the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan to take back the territory stolen by Satan and his evil forces.

Lesson 4.1 The Covenants of the Old Testament

Objectives

- 4.1.1 Give the rationale for conditions and promises in God's covenant with Abraham.*
- 4.1.2 Describe God's renewal of the promise to Abraham with later generations.*
- 4.1.3 Explain how the Covenant of the Law, or the Mosaic Covenant, spoke to all of Israel.*
- 4.1.4 Outline the relationship of the Davidic Covenant to the line of Christ's earthly birth.*

Lesson 4.2 The New Covenant through Christ

Objectives

- 4.2.1 Distinguish between the New Covenant and the Covenant of the Law.*
- 4.2.2 Describe the provisions of the New Covenant.*
- 4.2.3 Point out the role of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant.*
- 4.2.4 Explain the culmination of the Old Testament covenants.*

4.1	The Covenants of the Old Testament
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The word **covenant** in English traces its roots back to a Latin word that means “coming together.” In the Old Testament covenants demonstrate clearly that God’s plan of redemption was in motion soon after the Fall. A future nation of Israel was eventually to be a major part of the plan, but the covenants came first to individuals. In some instances, there were conditions to be met by the human parties involved. At other times, God declared what He was going to do no matter how the parties responded.

Give the rationale for conditions and promises in God’s covenant with Abraham.

God’s Covenant with Abraham

The **Abrahamic covenant** seems foundational to each of the later divine covenants. Abram, as he was called then, left Ur of the Chaldeans with his father Terah and other family members planning to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, which was on the way to Canaan, they settled there (Genesis 11:32). Abram’s father Terah died in Haran.

There are lessons to be learned from what happened next. We are not told why Terah took his family and headed toward Canaan. God leads and accomplishes His purposes in mysterious ways. After the death of Terah, God’s covenant word came to Abram. Hearing the clear voice of the LORD must have been an unbelievable experience for Abram. “The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). God’s plan was beginning to unfold. But can you imagine what went through Abram’s mind and heart as he heard God say, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2–3). Scripture simply tells us that Abram went as the LORD had told him. Are we able to recognize and then obey the voice of God when He speaks to us?

Why did God not withdraw His covenant promises when Abram was dishonest about Sarah?

The covenant builds. Having arrived in Canaan, Abram heard an added promise: “To your offspring [or seed] I will give this land” (Genesis 12:7). So far, God had placed no conditions on Abram.

After arriving back in Canaan, Abram came to Bethel where he had built an altar earlier. It is noteworthy that this time Abram “called on the name of the LORD” (13:4). Abram now was not just hearing the voice of the LORD; he was also communing with Him. Again the LORD repeated his covenant statement about the land. “Lift up your eyes from where you are.... All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth” (13:14–16). Same promise, but with added details: a permanent land and countless descendants. In chapter 15, Abram’s descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens (15:5).

After repeated promises of God’s covenant, Abram began to believe. Abram “believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). In spite of his past weaknesses, he believed the LORD. God still counts our belief in His promises as righteousness.

Fast-forward to Abram at ninety-nine years of age. God reminds Abram of the covenant. But He adds some conditions Abram must fulfill. “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers” (Genesis 17:1–2). As confirmation that he intended to do just that, Abram fell facedown before the Lord. And to mark the commitment of both parties, God changed the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah.

Describe God’s renewal of the promise to Abraham with later generations.

The Promise Renewed

The provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant can be summed up as (1) a promised people, (2) a promised blessing, and (3) a promised land. We will not treat later covenant affirmations in as much detail. But reminders are important. God confirmed the promise to Abraham’s son, Isaac. “Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws” (Genesis 26:3–5).

And to Jacob, in a dream of angels ascending and descending on a ladder to heaven, God repeated the covenant made with Abraham: “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be

blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:13–15). Humans are slow learners. But the Israelites could never forget the promises God affirmed to the three great patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Explain how the Covenant of the Law, or the Mosaic Covenant, spoke to all of Israel.

The Mosaic Covenant

God’s plan progresses. As the patriarchs were promised, their descendants have become the nation Israel. God told Moses what he should say to the people about His covenant with them.

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” (Exodus 19:3–6)

If Israel failed to meet the Old Testament covenants, why was Jesus sent with the need to fulfill them?

This covenant is conditional: “Obey me fully and keep my covenant.” The **Mosaic Covenant** was based on faithfulness of both God and Israel. Of course, Israel failed, but God is faithful, even when humans are not.

Horton (1996) summarizes the transitional nature of the Covenant of the Law: At Mount Sinai God brought Israel into a covenant relationship with himself by giving them the Law through Moses. That Law was not God’s final purpose, however. God still had blessings in view for all the peoples of the world. Israel was a chosen nation, chosen as a servant to help bring about that purpose [of blessing].... The world was not ready for Christ and the Cross.... Nor was Israel [in the Old Testament] the witness [fully prepared] for the spread of the gospel. Consequently, the Law was given as a temporary tutor (Gk.

paidagogos, Galatians: 3:24) to bring Israel down through the centuries until “the time had fully come” and “God sent his Son (Galatians 4:24–25).

Outline the relationship of the Davidic Covenant to the line of Christ’s earthly birth.

The Davidic Covenant

The **Davidic Covenant** is the perfect link between the Old Testament Covenants and the New Testament Covenant. Just as God gave Moses a message to deliver to Israel, God also gave the prophet Nathan a message, a divine covenant, to deliver to King David (2 Samuel 7:5–16). Look closely at the double reference of this passage:

The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:11–16)

Once again, there is no condition to this covenant. God would perform for “the man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14) all the things Nathan mentioned.

There is obvious reference to David’s son Solomon. But there are also references to a throne and kingdom that will endure and be established forever (7:13, 16). Only Jesus could fulfill that prophecy. The genealogies of Jesus’ birth, recorded in Matthew 1:1 and Luke 3:31, both show Jesus as a physical and legal descendant of David. The link between the Old Testament covenants and the covenant of the New Testament (New Covenant) lies in the relationship between David and Jesus. Peter tied the two together in his Day of Pentecost sermon, “Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he [David] was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:29–31).

If anything in the Old Testament proves that God had a plan for redeeming fallen humankind, a study of the covenants does it. Thank God, He had a plan. And in the fullness of time, it brought us our redemption.

4.2

The New Covenant through Christ

The words “new covenant” are found once in the Old Testament and six times in the New Testament. Christians who celebrate the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion, hear the words of Jesus: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25). But we must first look at the Old Testament reference to see what “new covenant” meant to the Israelites, and to Jews today.

Distinguish between the New Covenant and the Covenant of the Law.

The New Covenant Versus the Covenant of the Law

The prophet Jeremiah recorded God’s promise of a new covenant for Israel. “The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

Why is the Old Testament promise of a new covenant specifically directed to Israel?

Phrases like “my law in their minds and ... hearts” and “will remember their sins no more” sound much like the spiritual promises of the New Testament. But other parts do not.

From other passages of the Old Testament, we see that God has a special plan for Israel as a nation. The prophecy that all the world will be blessed through the nation of Israel

has not yet been fulfilled, though partial fulfillment has come through the conversion of many Gentiles (non-Jews). But as we will see in our study of the Millennium, Israel will yet fulfill that promise in a greater measure. The common thread that runs through all the promises to Israel and to born-again believers who make up the church is the real nature of the new covenant. Though there are physical elements in the new covenant, in comparison with the old covenant made with Israel, the new covenant is a spiritual or salvation covenant. The hearts of obedient and receptive Jews will be changed just as the other believers who have accepted Christ as Savior have been changed. As Horton (1996) notes, “There is only one new covenant, the covenant put into effect by the death of Jesus on Calvary’s cross” (176). Many Jews will recognize and accept their true Messiah, Jesus Christ. As the new covenant applies to the *who* of God’s people Israel, it would include Jewish believers who have accepted Jesus as Savior, as well as Jews who will accept Christ in the future. But the full picture is yet to be completed. As the new covenant applies to the church universal, it is being fulfilled right now in an ongoing way.

Some critics have rather carelessly charged that Israel disobeyed God’s covenant requirements and, therefore, has lost out with God. So, they say, God went to another group and made a covenant with them. Israel, they claim will never be the recipient of the glorious prophecies recorded in the Old Testament. They conclude that the descriptions of Israel’s glorious future are now being fulfilled figuratively in the church. But our belief in the literal fulfillment of biblical prophecy requires that the unfulfilled prophecies concerning Israel will yet be part of the future. (See Romans 11.)

Describe the provisions of the New Covenant.

Foundation of the New Covenant

Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 12:24), both now and in the future. A mediator reconciles differences between two parties who, for some reason, are not in agreement. Mediation would be especially difficult between sinless deity and sinful humans. Overcoming the differences and restoring a loving relationship demanded more than talking through a problem. It demanded a painful sacrifice.

Look again at the words of Jesus as He instituted the Lord’s Supper. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20). Under the Mosaic Covenant with Israel, the blood of a slaughtered animal was the focus of the sin offering. But regular sin offerings did not bring permanent obedience and relationship. The sin offering was a repeated bloody event that took the life of an animal. That animal could never be a mediator. But the Son of God could, and He willingly came to earth to be that

needed permanent Sacrifice. “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Timothy 2:5). Listen closely to the voice of our Mediator the next time you partake of Holy Communion: “This [bread] is my body, which is for you.... This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11:24–25). Our blessed Mediator is our wonderful Redeemer.

Point out the role of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant.

The Holy Spirit in the New Covenant

The new covenant is a spiritual relationship with our Creator. But frail humanity needs help in maintaining that divine fellowship. The Old Testament is a continuing story of the failures of God’s chosen people. Yet God’s plan from the beginning included a solution for this need. It was foretold by the prophet Joel who recorded God’s promise: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28–29).

Jesus, the Mediator in our relationship with the Father, knew we needed divine help. Just before He left the disciples and returned to the Father, Jesus promised a Helper just like himself. “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me” (John 15:26). Some fifty days later, Joel’s prophecy became reality. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended in dynamic power, filling the 120 followers with His presence and speaking through them in tongues of praise understood by all the visitors from foreign lands.

Paul saw that the reception of the Spirit by the Gentiles was part of the fulfillment of the promise of blessing that God gave to Abraham: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Galatians 3:13–14).

A glorious future awaits the Spirit-filled believer. In the meantime, “we have the firstfruits of the Spirit ... as we wait eagerly for ... the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) makes us more like Jesus with whom we will spend eternity. The gifts of the Spirit are a foretaste of the exciting life we will be living forever.

Paul saw the Day of Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit as evidence a new age had begun. “But it is only a foretaste, giving assurance of the promised Kingdom blessings.

Thus, he [Paul] refers to the Holy Spirit as God's 'seal of ownership on us' and 'his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit [a first installment], guaranteeing what is to come' (2 Corinthians 1:22). After speaking of the time when we will receive our new bodies, he [Paul] reemphasizes, 'God who has made us for this very purpose ... has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come' (2 Corinthians 5:5)" (Horton 1996, 155–156). Paul obviously saw the Holy Spirit as an important part of the new covenant life now *and* in the yet-to-be-fulfilled prophetic events of the future.

Explain the culmination of the Old Testament covenants.

The Old Covenants Complete in the New

The Old Testament covenants were not failures. They were steps in the progression of God's plan of redeeming fallen humankind. Thus, Israel is not forgotten in God's end-time plan.

We cannot agree with the skeptics who claim that Israel's glory days are all past, never again to be seen. There may be a spiritual pride in thinking and teaching that God has turned His back on Israel, because of its disobedience, and that now "we the church" are the complete fulfillment of the end-time prophecies about Israel. But the detailed accuracy of prophecy already fulfilled lets us know with assurance that we will see the fulfillment of God's future plans for Israel. We need not explain away what we imagine is not going to happen. We uphold the bold confession of faith in God's inspired Word: God said it. I believe it. That settles it for me! I trust it also settles it for you

5

The Two Meanings of Christ's Second Coming

We believe the return of Christ is imminent; this declaration is among the four core doctrines from the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths:

The resurrection of those who have fallen asleep in Christ and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; Romans 8:23; Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52).

The truth that Jesus could return at any moment does not seem to receive the attention it did in the early days of the Pentecostal revival. Today, this topic is seldom the

centerpiece of sermons, conferences, seminars, or other church gatherings. Consequently, believers may not receive a clear teaching on the imminence of Christ's return in the Rapture, or the implications of His return to earth at the Second Coming. Our study of Chapter 5 will give us a deeper biblical knowledge of our Blessed Hope.

Later in this chapter, you will find a chart—a useful study aid—describing the difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming. As we move through this chapter, we will carefully use the terms “Rapture” and “Second Coming.”

Lesson 5.1 The Rapture of the Church

Objectives

5.1.1 Explain “the Blessed Hope” of all believers in Christ Jesus.

5.1.2 Describe the “snatching away” of believers.

5.1.3 Summarize the various views on the time of the Rapture.

5.1.4 Justify the tribulation view that Pentecostals find most compatible with Scripture.

Lesson 5.2 The Holy Spirit's Role

Objectives

5.2.1 Discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in raising Christ from the dead.

5.2.2 Explain the role of the Holy Spirit in preparing saints for the Rapture.

Lesson 5.3 The Second Advent

Objectives

5.3.1 Explain what is meant by the phrase, “the Revelation of Christ.”

5.3.2 Describe Christ's triumphal return to earth with His saints.

Lesson 5.4 Raptured Believers Between the Rapture and the Second Advent

Objectives

5.4.1 Identify the basis for the judgment of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

5.4.2 Indicate the nature of the penalties and rewards that will be received.

5.4.3 Explain the biblical truth involved in the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

5.1	The Rapture of the Church
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Some children and young adults are not fully persuaded that they want Jesus to take them to be with Him in heaven. They may be looking forward to the things that give them pleasure here and now. It is natural for young men and women to fall in love, get married,

and have a family. The Rapture to them would be the end of everything, just as death is. As they grow older, however, and achieve more of their goals, life may begin to feel less attractive. Injury and sickness can make life almost unbearable. Whatever the reason, life on this earth can make heaven seem more attractive.

Many early Pentecostal believers came to Christ because they were overwhelmed with the demands life placed on them. Poverty was more frequent than prosperity. The words of Paul were music to their tired ears. “The dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18). But as God has blessed and prospered Spirit-filled believers, this life may seem to be just as attractive as the next life described in Scripture.

The Spirit-filled life and its moment-by-moment companionship with Christ should shine through prosperity or poverty, making the coming of the Lord the exciting event it should be for all believers. If the desire to be with Jesus, no matter how good this life may be, is not the highest passion of our lives, a check of our spiritual relationship with the Savior would be in order. Let that love and desire for Jesus’ presence grow as you study this lesson.

Explain “the Blessed Hope” of all believers in Christ Jesus.

The Blessed Hope

Why can the Rapture be called “the Blessed Hope”?

Reference to the blessed hope is found in Paul’s letter to Titus: “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the Blessed Hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11–13). Some Bible scholars identify this hope as the **Second Coming** after the Tribulation because of the words, “the glorious appearing of our ... Savior, Jesus Christ” (Horton, 495). They claim that Christ’s glorious appearing is when every eye sees Him at His coming with the angels and saints to gain a miraculous victory over Satan and Antichrist.

Walvoord (1999) defends the Rapture as the only possible meaning of the glorious appearing: “While the world will not see the glory of Christ at the time of the Rapture as they will at the time of the Second Coming, at the Rapture Christians will behold Him in His glory, and to them it will be a glorious appearing” (497). What greater glory could we behold, when we can say with the apostle Paul, “So shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

How many Christians are looking forward with anticipation to that day of glorious appearing? Not having experienced the joys of close communion with Jesus, which increases the desire to embrace the promise of being with Him for eternity, it is easy for one to want to hang on to the pleasurable experiences associated with this life *now*. Romance and marriage are strong human emotions and experiences. But those natural urges are God-given for the propagation of the human race. Yet, after this life are pleasures, experiences, and relationships that will make this life fade into insignificance. Earthly pleasures, no matter how much we enjoy them, can never compare with the future glory of heaven with Jesus forever.

Describe the “snatching away” of believers.

Embracing the Rapture

The word *rapture* comes from the Latin term *raptus* which means “to seize.” The Latin word is based on the Greek term *harpadzo* (1 Thessalonians 4:17), meaning “caught up” or “to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control of.” Most would naturally react to being grabbed or seized. We want to reserve control over our most intimate and personal space. To be suddenly stripped of that control is surely a threatening situation. So what will it feel like to be seized, snatched away, or caught up while we are sleeping, working, playing, or enjoying time with friends? What if you are a person who just cannot If you are afraid of such heights, what will be your feelings as you rise, caught up into the heavenlies?

What will our changed bodies be like in the Rapture?

Not to worry! The Bible suggests something happening that will completely change our response to unbelievable heights. Paul tells the Corinthians: “Just as we have borne the

likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.... Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:49, 51–52). Twice in two verses, Paul says, “We will be changed.” And it will happen in the twinkling of an eye.

The change in our bodies will be instant and incredible. Remember the account of Jesus, in His resurrection body, ascending into heaven. “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight” (Acts 1:9). Perhaps it is possible that at the Rapture believers will be taken up in their changed bodies. But can the human body make such a journey, or more—stand in the presence of God, in His holiness?

Summarize the various views on the time of the Rapture.

The Rapture in Relation to the Tribulation

Those who believe the Bible teaches a literal seven-year **Tribulation** period fall into one of three prophecy groups: post-, mid-, and pre-Tribulationists.

Post-Tribulation Rapture

Post-Tributionalists teach that the true church will be on earth during the entire seven years. Those of the **post-Tribulation Rapture** position apply all references to the Rapture and the Second Coming as a single event at the end of the Tribulation. They also present their position mainly by arguing against the **pre-Tribulation** position (Horton 1996, 122–125).

Mid-Tribulation Rapture

Mid-Tribulationists usually describe the first 3½ years of the seven-year Tribulation as fairly peaceful, especially in comparison with the last 3½ years. The two witnesses who—after forty-two months, are killed and ascend to heaven in a cloud while their enemies look on (Revelation 11:12)—are identified as representing the church. So a **mid-Tribulation Rapture** position assumes that the Rapture takes place at the same time—in the middle of the Tribulation.

In recent years, two modifications of the mid-Tribulation Rapture concept have appeared. The **Pre-wrath Rapture** position sees a difference between some of the earlier events of the Tribulation and later judgments of the full wrath of God. This view can place the Rapture any time after the middle of the seven years, up until just before the Second Coming if God’s wrath is quickly poured out. Other proponents of a mid-

Tribulation Rapture also teach a partial Rapture or multiple Raptures. The partial Rapture theory maintains that mature believers will watch and be ready for the Rapture, while immature and careless believers may miss the Rapture. But recognizing they have missed the Rapture, they will determine to make everything right with God and then be raptured. Neither of these modifications, like the primary Mid-Tribulation Rapture theory, is supported by convincing Bible evidence (Horton 1996, 125–128).

Pre-Tribulation Rapture

The Bible promises that born-again believers, the true church, will not have to face the severe judgments poured out in the Tribulation. That is because the church will be raptured before the seven-year Tribulation begins. “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9). We will examine this point in more detail in our next outline point.

Justify the tribulation view that Pentecostals find most compatible with Scripture.

Pentecostal Position on the Rapture

The imminence of Christ’s return to snatch away His bride is the primary reason that Pentecostals place the Rapture of the church before the Tribulation. Those who support the mid-Tribulation or post-Tribulation positions always point to something that must happen before the Rapture. It can simply be that the church must go through the prophesied judgments of God’s wrath, or something like the ascension of the two witnesses described in the mid-Tribulation discussion above. Paul describes how Jesus, by His resurrection, “rescues us from the coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

Why would God forbid our announcing a set date for the Rapture?

Throughout His teaching, Jesus stressed the importance of being ready for His coming to take His followers to be with Him (Matthew 24:42, 44, 50; 25:13; Luke 12:35, 40; 21:34–36). If we really believe that Jesus could come for us at any time, our lives—our words, actions, and choices—should reflect that truth. Those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb should live moment by moment with that expectation. Such an outlook would revolutionize our personal relationships and adjust the things we value most. May the

imminent likelihood of the Rapture permeate our lives. The day is much closer today than it has ever been in the past.

Setting specific dates for the Rapture to take place is seen throughout the history of Christianity. This is true in spite of warnings against such activity and declarations that no one can know the exact time of the Rapture. As significant milestones have come and gone, such as millennium changes (years 1000 and 2000) or events of worldwide significance, people have felt led to announce a definite date. It may be that they feel they are helping God bring converts into the Kingdom by announcing the terrible things that are going to happen on earth after the Rapture. But we never please God by disobeying His obvious command.

Two passages spell out God's attitude toward date setting. Paul refused to speculate on the exact time of Christ's coming for the saints. "About times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:1–2). Jesus himself said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come" (Mark 13:32–33). If that information is kept even from the angels, what could possibly be God's purpose in revealing the date to a human? That would actually defeat His purpose in forbidding the announcing of a date. We must always be ready to meet God. Death or the Rapture could come at any time. God does not want us to live carelessly until a known date arrives. He wants our entire devotion and commitment at all times.

5.2

The Holy Spirit's Role

The Holy Spirit was present at the creation of the world. "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2). He is mentioned in nearly two-thirds of the Old Testament books. But as Palma (2001) notes, "The accent is on what He does, not on what He is. There is no emphasis on His personhood or deity. It is the work, rather than the nature, of the Spirit that the Old Testament emphasizes. Consequently, He may be referred to as 'God-in-action' " (33).

John the Baptist's testimony about the Holy Spirit at the baptism of Jesus is powerful. "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:32–34). That marked the beginning of the Spirit-empowered three and a half year earthly ministry of our Lord.

Throughout the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is portrayed as an intimate companion of Jesus and ultimately a close companion of Spirit-filled believers. He is identified as “the Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7), “the Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9), and “the Spirit of his [God’s] Son” (Galatians 4:6). With Christ’s earthly ministry coming to a close, Jesus introduced His disciples to a new aspect of the Holy Spirit. Speaking tenderly to those He would be leaving, He said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:16–17). What a wonderful promise—a promise we can rely on as we walk with Christ by faith and look forward to His soon return. The Holy Spirit lives with us and is in us!

Discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in raising Christ from the dead.

The Holy Spirit in the Resurrection of Jesus

What part did the Holy Spirit have in the resurrection of Jesus?

The Holy Spirit was empowering in every phase of Christ’s earthly ministry. In as simple an act as going from one place to another, “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14). As Jesus suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane, an angel strengthened Him (Luke 22:43). The Holy Spirit, the Great Comforter, must also have ministered to Jesus in His agony.

Yet there was no greater manifestation of the Holy Spirit than in Christ’s resurrection. “The Holy Spirit participated in the stupendous miracle of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul declares that Jesus ‘through the Spirit of holiness [Hebrew way of saying ‘Holy Spirit’] was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead’ (Romans 1:4).... Had Jesus remained in the grave, His claims to deity would have been negated” (Palma 2001, 51).

This powerful work in resurrecting the body of Jesus is underscored by Paul. “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:11). Many a person in need of physical healing has claimed that verse for his or her own deliverance. Yet the final fulfillment of the promise will come when, at the Rapture, the bodies of believers in their graves will be quickened in resurrection power.

Explain the role of the Holy Spirit in preparing saints for the Rapture.

The Holy Spirit's Role in the Resurrection and Rapture

Just as the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, so will He one day raise us if we die before the Rapture. But the work of the Holy Spirit in this life is to prepare us for spending eternity with Christ.

What does the Holy Spirit do to prepare the believer for eternal life with Christ?

Jesus promised His disciples, as He was about to leave them, that He would send another Counselor or Comforter. *Another* means one like himself. So the things that Jesus did for His disciples, the Holy Spirit does for us today. Here is a quick look at some of the Spirit's ministry preparing us for eternal life with Jesus.

Indwelling the Believer

The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in a believer at salvation. "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9). The Spirit's continued indwelling depends on one's faith in Christ and resulting obedience. Every true believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We must use our bodies to glorify God. Learning to walk with God is great preparation for eternity with Him. This indwelling presence of the Spirit must not be confused with the infilling of the Spirit, which we will look at next.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The New Testament teaches that this experience, subsequent to salvation, is available to all believers. The book of Acts records the outpouring of the Spirit on early church believers. Some Christians today claim that the experience was only for the founding days of the church. But Pentecostals find no such declaration in Scripture and enjoy the beautiful Spirit-filled life. There will undoubtedly be Spirit-filled worship and communion in heaven. To learn such a walk in the Spirit in this life is good preparation for eternal life.

Aid in Prayer

Prayer is the language that receives a hearing in heaven. The Spirit-filled believer can claim the promise of Romans 8:26: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know

what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” Pentecostals understand this verse to describe praying in the Spirit. We may not know every detail the Spirit prompts us to pray in an unknown tongue, but we do know that we are praying according to the will of God. What a great preparation for the communication we will enjoy in heaven!

Distribution of Spiritual Gifts

Does every Spirit-filled believer have at least one gift?

Different gifts are given to different members of the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit provide a dynamic power for meeting the needs of the body of Christ and for reaching out to the lost in fulfilling the Great Commission (Mark 16:15). First Corinthians 12 lists nine special gifts: supernatural wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. But there are other offices and ministries described in Scripture as gifts: pastors, teachers, evangelists, administration, helping, giving, showing mercy, serving, and various others (1 Corinthians 12:28–30, Romans 12:4–8, Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10–11). Whatever gift or gifts we may be given, we should use them for God’s glory. In so doing, we will strengthen our effectiveness and the ability to operate in our gift to the blessing of others.

Empowerment to Witness

When Jesus, after His resurrection, told His disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they received the promised gift of the Father (Acts 1:4), they could only think of Israel’s future. So they asked, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (1:6). After telling His disciples it was not for them to know the times or the seasons of the future, Jesus gave one of the greatest prophecies of Scripture, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). That prophecy is still being fulfilled when a believer receives the baptism in the Holy Spirit. And around the world, millions are coming to know Christ because Spirit-filled believers are faithful witnesses.

Three times in two letters Paul describes the Holy Spirit as a deposit with a guarantee for the future. The Spirit is “a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5). With a little more precision, Paul calls the Holy Spirit “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession” (Ephesians 1:14). Horton (1996) identifies the inheritance as coming at the Rapture: “The deposit ... is a ‘first installment,’ an actual part of the inheritance that guarantees we will receive a larger measure later when we receive our full inheritance—that is, when Jesus returns and we receive our new bodies, changed into His likeness” (156). The inheritances our parents

might leave us in this life will pale in comparison with the inheritance we receive when we rise to meet our Lord in the air. So shall we ever be with our Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of that inheritance.

5.3 The Second Advent

We have looked at one of the two meanings of Christ's Second Coming. Calling the Rapture the Second Coming is not an exact use of the term. But now looking at the literal Second Coming, the time when Christ actually sets foot on the earth for the second time, we must be aware of the differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming or **Second Advent**. As you study this lesson, you may find it helpful to refer to the chart, "Distinguishing the Rapture from the Second Coming," located later in this lesson.

Bible commentaries on the events of end-time prophecy often have difficulty in making a smooth transition from one event to the next. Instead of a strict time-line, this course follows a subject approach rather than a chronological one. Therefore, we deal with the Rapture, the Second Coming, and what occurs in heaven between the two events. Of course, the Great Tribulation takes place on earth while the judgment of believers and the marriage supper of the Lamb occur in heaven. The Panorama of Prophecy Chart will help keep the connection between the various events in proper focus.

We should remember a very important truth as we study all the end-time events from this point on. Although there are exciting things awaiting us beyond the Rapture, the only thing we should be looking for right now is meeting the Lord in the air. We are not preoccupied with the Tribulation, the Second Coming, the Millennium, or the eternal ages beyond. Our entire focus should be on living now so that we will be spiritually ready for death or the Rapture. If we are not ready, the blessings beyond will mean nothing at all. We certainly do not want to miss the blessed future God has planned for His children.

Explain what is meant by the phrase, "the Revelation of Christ."

The Primary Feature of the Second Coming

Why is the last book of the Bible called “Revelation”?

Books of the New Testament are often named for the writer of the book (as we find with the Gospels), for the person or people to whom the book is addressed (as with the letters to various churches), or—as in the case of Revelation and Acts—for the subject matter of the book. The first two verses of Revelation tell us that Christ is the central figure in the book. “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1–2). “His servants” refers to “believers who belong to Jesus and are fully committed to serving Him” (Horton 1996, 24). Even in the Great Tribulation, the main character is not Antichrist, but rather Jesus Christ. We must never overlook this important fact.

It is a surprise to some that the Second Coming is mentioned in the Old Testament. Though it is usually associated with Christ’s future reign on David’s throne, which will be accomplished after the Second Coming, Daniel observes that Christ’s coming will mark the beginning of His reign over the whole world. “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [God, the Father] and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13–14).

The **revelation** or appearance of Christ at His Second Coming is far different from the image of the little babe lying in a manger at the first advent. Revelation 19:11–16 describes Christ as a Commander leading the armies of heaven, including saints and angels, to defeat Satan and the Antichrist and reclaim sovereignty over the whole world. The description is awesome:

What is the significance of the name written on Christ that only He knows?

I [John] saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen,

white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

The appearance of the Conquering Christ is going to be awesome beyond words. There is going to be no mistaking Christ’s glory and majesty at His Second Coming.

Describe Christ’s triumphal return to earth with His saints.

Christ’s Return to Earth

When Christ comes back to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, He will be followed by an army of angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8) and raptured saints (Colossians 3:4, 1 Thessalonians 3:13). That would be an imposing powerful army, ready to do battle with Satan, Antichrist, and their forces. However, the army will stand back as observers as Christ wages the battle supernaturally. Not an angel or saint will be lost. The score is settled for every saint who, on earth, has suffered unjustly: “God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled.... This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thessalonians 1:6–8). The blazing fire and the sharp devastating sword that comes out of Christ’s mouth (Revelation 19:15) will have wiped out the anti-God armies of the nations of the world.

What is the menu for the feast to which the birds are invited?

When the battle is over, it is mop-up time. We can hardly imagine the devastation and carnage—all on the losing side—when the warfare ceases. An angel invites all the birds to “gather together for the great supper of God” (Revelation 19:17).

Who is the beast that is judged and cast into the fiery lake of burning sulfur when the battle is over?

With all the modern inventions of warfare, why does Jesus come to earth riding a white horse?

Then comes judgment time. Though most of the multitudes from the nations of the world will have been destroyed, two are preserved for immediate judgment. “The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh” (Revelation 19:20–21).

We do not have all the answers to questions that arise about end-time events. Paul described our inability to understand in earthly terms what grandeur and glory will actually be seen at the Second Coming. “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). The heavenly realities of the future are beyond our earthly abilities to comprehend. When we read of Paul’s mention of a mirror, we may think of the mirrors we have today. But in his day a mirror was “a smooth piece of brass that would give a very barely perceptible [and] recognizable reflection” (Allen 1999, 152).

The reality of what we will see as we come back to earth with Christ can never be fully described for earthly minds. John writes, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:2–3). That truth applies to both the Rapture and the Second Coming. We cannot even dream of the majesty and glory of these events. The visions that John the Revelator saw had to be translated into earthly terms he and his readers could comprehend. The things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of the glorious sights and sounds we will one day behold. Hasten, Lord, that day!

Distinguishing the Rapture from the Second Coming	
<i>At the Imminent Rapture</i>	<i>At Christ’s Second Coming (Revelation)</i>
Believers taken (snatched away) from the earth	No translation of anyone

Dead believers resurrected; meet Christ in the air	No resurrection of saints
Living and dead believers meet Jesus in the air	Believers return to earth with Jesus
Jesus does not set foot on the earth	Jesus stands on the Mount of Olives
Living saints saved from the Great Tribulation	Christ defeats evil survivors of the Tribulation
Saints disappear suddenly	Every eye will see Jesus
Could happen at any time	Comes at the end of the 7-year Tribulation
Transition from earth to heaven	Transition from heaven to earth
Followed by marriage and wedding supper in heaven	Followed by defeat of Satan and judgment of the wicked at the Great White Throne Judgment
Dead believers resurrected before living saints are raptured	Signals beginning of Christ's reign on earth for 1,000 years
Saints judged when saved by accepting Christ while on earth	Christ judges Satan at end of the Tribulation and His followers at the Great White Throne
No mention of angels or impending judgment	Christ, saints, angels combat Satan
Can happen anytime; nothing needs to come first	Many signs will precede the Second Coming

5.4	Raptured Believers Between the Rapture and the Second Advent
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We face again the difficulty of studying end-time events in an ordered sequence. While the raptured saints are in heaven with Christ, until they return with Him at the Second Advent, terrible things are happening on earth. The terrible judgments of the Tribulation, from which the saints have escaped, are happening as God's wrath is poured out against indescribable wickedness.

But two very blessed events are taking place in heaven during the seven-year period. First comes the Judgment Seat of Christ, followed shortly by the marriage of Christ and His bride (the church). Then comes the celebration of that long promised spiritual union: the wedding supper of the Lamb. But first, rewards are given.

Identify the basis for the judgment of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Basis of the Believer's Judgment

If God forgives all previous sin when a person becomes a believer, why is there another judgment of Christians after the Rapture?

Sin was judged forever when Christ on the cross declared, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Here on earth, when a sinner accepts Christ as personal Savior and becomes a believer, a judgment takes place. Sins are forgiven, and God remembers them no more. Yet the Bible tells us of a different kind of judgment when believers are judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This judgment is also called "the Bema [Greek "seat" or "throne"] Judgment."

The Bible tells us we are saved through faith alone, "not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:6). Some people think they are saved by what they do for God. Not so! But works and deeds are important. James tells us, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20, 26). So, although works cannot save us, if we do not have any, we prove that we do not really have the faith needed for salvation. And we will find out just how important works are when they are reviewed at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The basis for the judgment is described in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." The two last adjectives of this verse

do not mean “righteous or evil.” *Rather than a moral distinction, this will be a value distinction.* Some works or deeds will last, others will not. “If any man builds on this foundation [Jesus Christ] using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames” (1 Corinthians 3:12–15).

The same words or actions of good can come from an individual, whether he or she is a saint or a sinner. It is the motive, the attitude, and the character that God judges. Gold, silver, and costly stones are the works done out of right motives. Works done from pride or selfishness, rather than built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, are wood, hay, or straw. These will disappear when consumed by the fire of God’s judgment. The faithfulness that Christ requires grows out of our love for Him.

Indicate the nature of the penalties and rewards that will be received.

Penalties and Rewards

How can we be sure the judgment of our earthly deeds will be fair?

There are many references in the Old Testament to God as a righteous and just Judge (Genesis 18:25, Leviticus 19:34, Deuteronomy 32:4, Job 4:17, Isaiah 45:21). “At the end of the age he will still be the Righteous Judge, but he will mediate that judgment through the son for ‘the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father’ (John 5:22).... Jesus has the right and the authority to judge ‘because he is the Son of man’ (John 5:27). In other words, just as He is a High Priest who is able ‘to sympathize with our weaknesses,’ for He ‘has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin’ (Heb. 4:15), so He is a Judge who truly understands us and will do what is right” (Horton 1996, 83).

Paul writes that there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). This assurance carries over to the Judgment Seat of Christ, with or without rewards. But we should not be satisfied just to go up in the Rapture. We want to lay down at the feet of our benevolent Judge the glory of works that are the caliber of gold, silver, and costly stones, not those worthy of only being consumed in fire.

We should not be working just to gain rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We should be laboring in God's vineyard because we love Him. Throughout the New Testament, crowns are symbols of reward for faithfulness. Paul uses the crown imagery on at least two occasions. "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (1 Corinthians 9:25). As he recognized that death was approaching, Paul wrote to Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7–8). The apostle Peter used the crown imagery too. "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

What will the rewards be for the righteous?

We today associate crowns with a king or a queen as a mark of nobility. A crown and all that it stands for may sound attractive in our material world. But if everyone in heaven is wearing a crown, it would not have much meaning. Yes, there may be great crowns and lesser crowns, but the rewards must be something more meaningful.

Walvoord (1999) speculates, "Most likely the rewards will be privileged service. The Christian in heaven will be overwhelmed by the wonderful grace and love of God, and he will desire to do something to show his love for God. He will do this by serving. While Scripture is not clear as to how we will serve, in the millennial kingdom we will reign with Christ. In the eternal state, the promise is as recorded in Revelation 22, 'His servants shall serve Him' (v. 3). All Christians will receive their just recognition at the judgment seat of Christ. Especially those who have labored in obscurity and sometimes with great sacrifice and fidelity will be rewarded according to their service" (161).

Our lives today should be lived in light of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Our faithful labor should not be to receive greater rewards, but because we love God and want to obey and serve Him. Christ knows the deepest desires of our hearts. His rewards will be based on what we do with the gifts He has given each of us.

Explain the biblical truth involved in the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

The Wedding Supper of the Lamb

After the rewards are distributed, the long-awaited marriage will take place. How this marriage image is literally worked out, we do not know fully—not yet! But the Revelation record gives us the picture, perhaps in terms that we in this earthly intellect and understanding can comprehend and compare it to. Revelation explains the celebration of a wedding banquet. Christ (the Bridegroom) and the bride (the church) are familiar references throughout the New Testament. Three verses in the book tell us all we know about the supper. A multitude of voices shout, “ ‘Our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ ” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:6–8). It is interesting to note that the dress of the bride in this passage is the same as the dress of the saints coming back with Christ at the Second Coming (Revelation 19:14).

Our relationship with Jesus here on earth should be a love relationship. We know He loves us. As God, Jesus humbled himself, came to earth as a servant, and was crucified that a love relationship might be restored. John writes, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). That must include loving our neighbor as well as our God. Just as a young man and woman are engaged to be married because they are in love, we too are engaged to be wed eternally to Christ, the Bridegroom. Are you finding that love growing deeper as the wedding date draws nearer?

6

Living in Expectation of Christ's Coming

Hope and despair are extreme opposites. The believer's hope, confirmed by Scripture, is that God is in control of our world. But what hope is there for those who do not believe that the Divine communicates with humans? For them, death is the end of everything. Their only hope lies in what happens before death. So hoping for as much happiness as they can find, they turn to selfish pleasure and immediate gratification.

Some believe God exists, yet they are victims of despair. They do not know Him as a personal God who loves them and sent His Son to die that they might trade their despair for hope. It is these neighbors we must introduce to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The trials and tests of life will then fade in importance as people are introduced to the one who holds their future in His hands. There is no permanent hope apart from "the God of hope" (Romans 15:13). Our hope as believers rests on the sacrifice of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

But what does Christ expect us to be doing as we wait for the Blessed Hope of the Rapture? Although our translation into the presence of Christ is a glorious promise of deliverance from the struggles and evil of the world, there is work to be done, both in our own lives and in reaching out to the lost. In this chapter, we are challenged to be working diligently while we wait patiently.

Lesson 6.1 Anticipating Christ's Return

Objectives

6.1.1 *Describe the lifestyle required as believers await Jesus' return.*

6.1.2 *Indicate the importance of holy living.*

Lesson 6.2 Purposeful Labor

Objectives

6.2.1 *Describe the urgency of reaching the lost with the gospel.*

6.2.2 *Identify signs of the close of the age, which Jesus communicated to the disciples.*

6.2.3 *Examine the relationship between the believer's earthly lifestyle and the Judgment Seat of Christ.*

6.1

Anticipating Christ's Return

The final days before a marriage are busy days, especially for the bride. She plans and checks every detail of the ceremony so that everything goes smoothly. In ancient **patriarchal cultures**, however, the bridegroom's family was responsible for marriage arrangements.

Though we need to continue to remember that the language of this heavenly affair, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is surely limited to/by our earthly comprehension, the parallel between an earthly marriage and the heavenly marriage of Christ and His bride is more in line with marriage practices when the Bible was written. This does not cause Christians in other cultures around the world any difficulty because Christ's deity is superior to the beings He created. Furthermore, the matter of sexual identity is no longer pertinent, because as Jesus said to the doubting Sadducees, "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).

Yet the Bible was written for humans who do marry, not for angels who do not. So the comparison of the ultimate union of Christ and the church with a marriage is very appropriate. There is no better image to teach us that God loves us with an everlasting love. The tender love of deity toward obedient humans is expressed by Jude: "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life" (v. 18). We look now at what we, as the future bride of Christ, should be doing in preparation for that Great Day.

Describe the lifestyle required as believers await Jesus' return.

More Than Just Waiting

A bride anticipating the wedding day is motivated by love. There are things to be done before the big day! But preparation for the union with Christ in heaven is different. Instead of preparing the outward appearance, the church—that is, all believers

everywhere—must work with Him for the manifestation of her inner life. The Bridegroom looks only at the heart and its demonstration of love.

The Purified Bride

Paul gave good advice to young Titus concerning his **sanctification** as he waits for Christ's coming: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the Blessed Hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11–14). God's grace teaches what the church is to learn: to say no to worldly passions and yes to upright and godly living. It is a terrible shame when any one of the church pulls back from the commitment of that partnership and falls again into the shame and darkness of sin. As you prepare to meet the Bridegroom face to face, make these verses your daily reminder to grow more like Jesus: "When he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2–3).

The Alert Bride

What does it mean to watch for His return?

Watching usually means fixing one's eyes on someone or something. But watching for Christ's return does not mean looking up to the heavens, hoping to see Him with our physical eyes. At Christ's ascension after His resurrection, the disciples "were looking intently up into the sky as he [Jesus] was going" (Acts 1:10). As they gazed in awe, two angels assured them that Jesus would come back the same way He went up. Like the disciples, we have to be ready, with hearts desiring His coming. Those who are ready will be taken. "Therefore keep watch [be ready with a pure heart toward God], because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42).

Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Watch your words, for they become actions. Watch your actions, for they become habits. Watch your habits, for they become your character. Finally, your character becomes your eternal destiny. But it all begins with watching your thoughts. "Finally, brothers [and sisters], whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

We cannot measure our lives as Christians against the wickedness of the world. When we stand before God, we cannot plead, "I was not as bad as they were." We must measure ourselves by God's standard. What we do in secret in this life will one day be exposed

publicly, if it is not forgiven and forsaken. Too many Christians fall victim to the curse of pornography and its destruction of pure minds and hearts. We must not forget that our mind is the guardian of our body. “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:18–20). Only the pure in heart, mind, and body will rise to meet Christ at His coming. Past sins can and should be forgiven, and forsaken.

Indicate the importance of holy living.

Increasing Intimacy

People respond to God in a variety of ways. Some are afraid of Him, and some view Him as a mythological figure like Santa Claus. But the believer who has invited Christ into his or her heart should have a reverential awe towards God that also includes a deep relationship of abiding trust.

Intimacy in Worship

Most of us will never have a personal relationship with a king or president. Even if we did meet such a person, it might be just for a moment and only once in a lifetime. We stand in awe at people who have achieved such distinguished leadership roles. However, there is no greater figure of majesty, glory, and greatness than God. He certainly deserves our worship. Yet in all of His majesty, He wants to be a personal friend of every living human being. We can have a closer relationship with God than we will ever have with a king or president.

In an article titled, “A Bow and a Kiss,” Yancey (2005) writes that the “bow” before God represents our awe in the presence of One so much more majestic than we can ever comprehend. The “kiss” represents the personal love relationship we can have with our Creator. We worship God, who is so much greater than we are, yet He wants us to love Him as He loves us. Would you not agree, this is a beautiful and tender picture of our relationship with Christ, Our Lord?

Closer in Communion

Why do we call the Lord’s Supper *Holy Communion*?

The words communion, community, communication, and common all have a similar origin. The church of Jesus Christ is a community of believers, and in that body of believers, Pentecostals can be called a Spirit-filled community. Communication is the sharing of ideas and feelings. And a common belief is one held by the entire community. Since the body of Christ, a God-ordained community, comes together to remember what Christ did to establish the community of believers, it is entirely appropriate that the Lord's Supper would come to be called Communion.

We also speak of having communion with God. Private devotions are times when we can have intimate communion with our Savior. The Holy Spirit even helps us in this communion. "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26).

It is impossible to describe what heaven will be like. There are not adequate words in earthly languages to tell what it really will be. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments, he addressed the Israelites: "These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness.... You heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire" (Deuteronomy 5:22–23). The Israelites were afraid they would die because they had seen the glory of the Lord.

Closer in the Experience of His Glory

How do we define the glory of God?

God is omnipresent. Though God as a Spirit is everywhere present, His physical manifestations as recorded in the Scripture has always shaken the human observer mentally, physically, and spiritually. The apostle Paul speaks of an experience of being caught up to Paradise. He heard, and most likely saw, "inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (2 Corinthians 12:4). He no doubt caught a glimpse of the glory of God.

In the year 1900 (fourteen years before the founding of the Assemblies of God), a song was published about the glory of God that we will see in heaven. Charles H. Gabriel wrote the music and lyrics based on his acquaintance with Ed Card, superintendent of the Sunshine Rescue Mission in St. Louis, Missouri. Card was enthusiastic in his love for Christ. He would often shout "Glory" in the middle of a sermon, where others would say "Amen" or "Hallelujah." He would often close his prayer with "and that will be glory for me!" That prompted Gabriel to write, "O That Will Be Glory." The last lines of the first stanza read,

Just to be near the dear Lord I
adore,
Will through the ages be glory
for me.
O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me,
When by His grace I shall look
on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for
me.

Is your heart set on the glory of that day? Are you drawing closer to the lover of your soul who will soon be your bridegroom? Determine today to live with eternity and its glory in view.

6.2

Purposeful Labor

Just before healing a blind man, Jesus said, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:4–5). Performing healings and miracles was just part of the work Jesus came to do. His main purpose in coming to earth was to give His life a ransom for our salvation (Mark 10:45). Even the miracles and healings pointed toward His main mission: to die on the Cross for our sins.

Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth identifies what should be our primary purpose. The Great Commission continues to be our greatest passion and directive because there is no greater calling than bringing lost souls to Christ. Most of you studying this course are preparing for ministry of some kind. Whether a senior pastor, associate pastor, children’s pastor, minister of music, Sunday school teacher, or nursery worker, your call is the same. Of course, there is a second part of the Great Commission: teaching and making disciples of those brought to Christ (Matthew 28:19–20). There is much work still to be done. The urgency of the hour is great!

Describe the urgency of reaching the lost with the gospel.

Our Primary Ministry

How are we to fulfill the Great Commission?

We have seen the beginning of God's plan for the ages in restoring the fellowship for which Adam and Eve were originally created. The plan will be completed as the future events of biblical prophecy unfold. But the church of Jesus Christ has an important role now. The plan calls for workers to go into the whitened harvest fields and win them one by one. Each one won is another who escapes eternal punishment and can look forward to eternity with the One who loves them without reservation.

We are to be Christ's witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). That means we are to tell others among any and every tongue and peoples, in every place of Christ's death for our sins and His resurrection that proves His deity (Acts 1:22). But how do we go about that task? Is the printing of tracts or the inviting of unsaved neighbors to church witnessing? Rather than looking at methods that will or will not work, we must look at what Jesus said should anoint our witnessing.

As Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure, He told them not to leave Jerusalem but instead wait to be baptized with the Holy Spirit (1:5). Since they had never seen a person baptized in the Holy Spirit, with accompanying manifestations, their minds went to what He was going to be doing when He left them. "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (1:6). Their nation Israel and the kingdom of God were foremost in their thinking. But Jesus wanted to tell them of a soon-coming experience that would equip them powerfully for their task of witnessing. His answer to their question was, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem ... Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:7-8). A witness tells what Christ has done in his or her life.

The empowering infilling of the Holy Spirit is desperately needed as we live in these last days and see evil spreading on every side. Though one can ascend in the Rapture without having received this blessed experience, it is God's intent that every believer should receive empowerment for more effective witnessing. If you have not yet received the Baptism, open your heart to the experience. If you have received, be Christ's voice encouraging others to tarry until they receive. The Kingdom needs more Spirit-filled witnesses! Remember that your experience also needs to be kept up-to-date. We need a daily dependence on the Holy Spirit.

How does preaching differ from witnessing?

We are to preach the good news of salvation to all who will listen and believe. Preaching that is anointed by the Holy Spirit penetrates cold hearts. John the Baptist preached or proclaimed a “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). After His baptism by John and temptation by Satan, Jesus “began to preach, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near’ ” (Matthew 4:17). Proclaiming what would happen in the near and distant future was an important part of Christ’s earthly ministry.

Jesus mentioned that the Pharisees also preached. But He warned the crowds and the disciples not to obey them. “Do not do what they [the teachers of the law and the Pharisees] do, for they do not practice what they preach” (Matthew 23:3). The minister of the gospel must never be guilty of that charge.

The results of witnessing and preaching must be preserved. The preacher proclaims the Words of Life. The one who responds by turning and believing steps into his or her own testimony or personal witness. Water baptism calls the new convert to make a public profession of faith and a commitment to follow Jesus without turning back to the old life: this is a public witness. Then follows the teaching or discipling period of growing closer to the Savior and becoming more Christlike. Truly, the Great Commission is carried out through witnessing, preaching, baptizing, and teaching. The purpose is to make disciples.

Identify signs of the close of the age, which Jesus communicated to the disciples.

Signs of the Time

How should we view such worldwide catastrophes as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, wars, floods, and famines?

If God is love, why does He allow evil to come into our lives?

Jesus' disciples were always interested in the future, especially when the nation of Israel would be restored to greatness. But Jesus told them other things would come first. "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:4–8). How many of these signs are occurring today? There are so many misguided people claiming to have the truth. These may not always go by the name of Christ, but they consider themselves little messiahs whom others should listen to and follow. Wars! There is a war going on somewhere in the world at any given time. And the threat of nuclear bombs frightens nations, not just individuals. Nations are fighting to be considered the most powerful on earth. Famines: thousands are dying around the world because they do not have enough to eat. Earthquakes: even worse, tsunamis or great ocean tidal waves devastate the coastline of many countries. Regardless of the events that are occurring in our changing world, though, we must remember that Jesus could return for us at any time. No one knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36). He warns us to be ready (Matthew 24:44).

Skeptics blame God for the natural disasters that seem to grow more intense in each succeeding generation. They ask, "If God is **omnipotent**, why does He not stop human suffering and natural disasters that destroy countless lives?" So when we see these things, they argue that God is either not omnipotent or not kind or loving, but is rather a cruel and uncaring Being. Yet God's inspired Word declares that God is both all-powerful and just" (Job 42:2, Matthew 19:26, Genesis 18:25, Deuteronomy 32:4, Isaiah 45:21). We also see two basic responses to suffering: some turn towards God in times of suffering, while others turn away from Him.

How can a just and loving God allow human suffering and natural disasters? Bible prophecy tells us that Jesus Christ will one day end all suffering, destruction, and death. Those faithful to Christ, in spite of earthly suffering and death, can look forward to that day. The perfect world still in the future is the hope of those who accept God's offer of salvation and restored fellowship. If there were no choice between good and evil, there would be no chance of choosing anything but submission to God. An omnipotent God can choose when to use His almighty power, and when to withhold it for a higher purpose.

We need not be unduly alarmed by the events reported in the news. We need not be fearful when we read about the various judgments that will be poured out in the Tribulation. Christians need not fear the future. In fact, Jesus told His disciples, and His word still rings true today, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Our world contains many things that could cause fear. But God gives peace in the midst of storms (Mark 4:39).

Examine the relationship between the believer's earthly lifestyle and the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Investing for Eternity

Now is the time to give full attention to laying up treasure in heaven (Mark 10:21)—treasure that will be received as rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God's workman deserves his or her wages, but reports of extravagant lifestyles of some religious public figures discredit the message of the Kingdom.

Laying up treasure in heaven is quite different from laying up treasure here on earth. In God's eyes, it is what we give away, not what we keep, that counts. Remember the full verse about laying up treasure in heaven? "Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Matthew 19:21–22). Not many of us have to struggle with great wealth. But we should all be thinking of earning that "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

God's servants do not have to look poor. But wealth should never be their pursuit. Faithfulness and humility in the use of God's financial blessings will keep the focus on spiritual priorities. Young ministers seldom start out with wealth. But God's blessing can include growing income. Make the commitment now that any material blessings that come in the future are still God's resources and will be used as He would use them. The rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ will have little similarity with earthly rewards. We may be surprised at the ones who receive the greatest rewards there!

Unit 3

The Tribulation

The tone of our prophecy study now takes a dark turn. Having traced end-time events involving the faithful, we must now turn to the end-time events involving the wicked, or those who have not accepted Christ as Savior. Yet Christ is still the centerpiece in the judgment of the unrighteous.

Strangely enough, there seems to be an unusual interest among Christians in such persons (or whatever the figure may be) as the Antichrist, the mark of the beast, the two witnesses, and the role of present day nations during the Tribulation. These matters are important to our effectively sharing the gospel, when questions about the future arise. But before we begin our study, let us do a little soul searching. Is our interest in the events of the Tribulation, as they seem to be for some, for the purpose of planning a strategy in case we should miss the Rapture? Or do we find interest in the subject because it reminds us of God's faithfulness in preserving us from such terrible times on earth? Above all, our study of the Tribulation should make us more effective witnesses to the salvation that is the only escape for those who could be left on earth after the Rapture.

If believers are not going to be on earth to go through the agonies of the Tribulation, why should we study the subject in such detail? For the simple reason that when we realize unsaved family members, neighbors, and acquaintances will face such devastation, suffering, and even hideous death, we cannot help but feel a burden for their future without Christ. We must carry the good news to those who could face only bad news during the Tribulation.

Chapter 7 The Tribulation as Partial Fulfillment of the “Day of the Lord”

Lessons

- C7.1 The End-time Tribulation in Contrast to the Extreme Crises of Today
- C7.2 Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: The End-time in Historical Perspective
- C7.3 Alternate Views of the Tribulation

Chapter 8 Active Groups and Individuals in the Tribulation

Lessons

- C8.1 Major Figures in the Tribulation
- C8.2 Antichrist: Personification of Evil
- C8.3 The Nation of Israel in the End-time

Chapter 9 The Judgments in Revelation

Lessons

- C9.1 John's Vision of the Seven Seals of Judgment
- C9.2 John's Vision of the Seven Trumpets of Judgment
- C9.3 John's Vision of the Seven Bowls of Judgment

Chapter 10 Armageddon: Climax of the Tribulation

Lessons

- C10.1 The Ultimate Conflict Between God and Satan
- C10.2 Preparation for the Millennium

7

The Tribulation as Partial Fulfillment of the "Day of the Lord"

The **Day of the Lord** is mentioned over twenty times in the Old and New Testaments. The prophet Joel mentions the day five times. Three New Testament writers use the term: Luke (Acts 2:20), Paul (1 Corinthians 5:5, 2 Corinthians 1:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:2), and Peter (2 Peter 3:10). The mention of the Day of the Lord in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 shows that the early church was concerned about the event or the time frame of the event.

In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian Christians, we find our best definition of the Day of the Lord: "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness ["sin" KJV] is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped" (2 Thessalonians 2:1–4). The Day of the Lord begins with the Great Tribulation.

From all the references in Scripture to the Day of the Lord, Horton (1996) gives us this definition: "The Day of the Lord, or the Day of Judgment, ... is more than a twenty-four-hour day, for it includes the whole period from the Rapture to the Great White Throne Judgment [of the resurrected wicked]" (189). So rather than a literal 24-hour day, the Day of the Lord encompasses a significantly longer period of time. While the Tribulation is only part of the Day of the Lord, it certainly is the most dramatic portrayal of God's judgment of evil.

Lesson 7.1 The End-time Tribulation in Contrast to the Extreme Crises of Today

Objectives

- 7.1.1 Identify Scripture promises showing God's faithfulness to His children.*
- 7.1.2 Contrast Tribulation judgments with present tribulation.*

Lesson 7.2 Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: The End-time in Historical Perspective

Objectives

- 7.2.1 Indicate the importance of the book of Daniel to end-time events.*
- 7.2.2 Explain which historical empires are represented in the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.*
- 7.2.3 Explain Daniel's imagery of the four beasts and the little horn.*
- 7.2.4 Clarify the meaning of Daniel's Seventy Weeks.*

Lesson 7.3 Alternate Views of the Tribulation

Objectives

- 7.3.1 Define the preterist, historicist, and idealist views of the Tribulation.*
- 7.3.2 Explain why the futurist Tribulation view is reliable and true to Scripture.*
- 7.3.3 Clarify the basis for our belief that believers will not go through the Tribulation.*

7.1	The End-Time Tribulation in Contrast to the Extreme Crises of Today
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Around the world right now, believers are being persecuted and killed for their Christian testimony. As we have already noted, Scripture predicts that in these last days before the Rapture, there will be wars and rumors of war. Many of those wars grow out of animosity between different religions. In one area, it may be a Catholic/Protestant conflict. In other areas, it is Muslim against Christian. In the past it has been Christian against Muslims in the Crusades. Some countries even make it illegal for a person to change religions. Frequently, it is conversion to Christianity that is forbidden. Christians whose family members are being murdered for their faith may feel they are already going through terrible tribulation, yet history records that the church of Jesus Christ grows on the martyrdom of believers. The church had its beginning through the shed blood of Jesus. And ever since, the blood of martyrs has fueled the growth of the church. True believers refuse to deny their faith, no matter what the cost.

Identify Scripture promises showing God's faithfulness to His children.

God's Strength for His Children

Because sin is a reality in this world, the believer's life will always have challenges. And though there is the possibility of divine healing for every believer who suffers, our bodies still age and lose the energy of youth. All humans are destined to die (Hebrews 9:27).

The reality is that everyone will encounter difficulties or disappointments in this life. Christians are certainly not sheltered from all trials and difficulties. An accident can happen at the next street corner. A tornado or windstorm can damage or destroy one's home. Finding out that one no longer has a job that provides family support can cause hard times of testing and uncertainty.

International threats also add uncertainty to human life. Terrorism can impact your part of the world. In your own community, godless individuals may steal, cheat, or otherwise take advantage of law-abiding citizens. There may be trouble in your circle of relatives or even within your own family. The world and its ungodly influences can present real challenges in your personal life and can impact your children. These are only a few of the struggles people can face.

God knew all this long before we were born on this planet. His inspired Word has promises that can help us through every one of our challenges and struggles. The words of Jesus are eloquent. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). And the Psalms are full of assurance. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). Trouble describes the struggles of life. But "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). No matter what is going on around us, there is peace and strength available for the follower of Christ.

Contrast Tribulation judgments with present tribulation.

The Judgments of the Great Tribulation Versus the Experiences of Present-Day Tribulations

How does a believer's martyrdom in this life compare with the death of sinners in the Great Tribulation? What can be worse than death?

It is easy to view our daily troubles and struggles as tribulations. Some Christians in various parts of the world have at times faced such horrendous persecution, suffering, and even the martyrdom of family members that they may have begun to think that they were already living in the Great Tribulation. Of course, our understanding of Bible prophecy tells us that true believers will escape God's Tribulation judgments on the evil inhabitants of earth. We will go up in the Rapture before the Tribulation begins. But in the midst of intense suffering, that hope may seem distant. Regardless of the degree of persecution encountered today, believers are called to be faithful, even unto death. We admire the courage and thank God for the tenacity of every suffering believer who remains faithful to God even to the point of death in the midst of the persecutions that are taking place in the world today.

Our study of the wrath of God poured out in judgment on the wicked—in the Tribulation—will show that the worst difficulties a believer faces in this life are not the same as the Tribulation judgments God pours out on the wicked. It is difficult to find points of agreement with the interpretation of those who teach the church will go through the Tribulation. They take the judgments as symbolic rather than literal, or they interpret the “wrath” as the lake of fire, the final state of the wicked. When one surveys the biblical descriptions of God's wrath poured out in the Tribulation, we can rejoice over God's faithfulness in promising this: “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him” (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10). The next verse tells us we are to comfort and edify fellow believers who may have concerns about the future. “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (5:11).

There is a great difference between the experiences of the unbelievable suffering that can be experienced in our present life—generally called tribulation with a small *t*—and end-time Tribulation. Even if we attribute our trials, struggles, and troubles in this life to Satan's efforts to afflict us, Satan's wrath is nothing in comparison with the wrath of Almighty God, administered through His Son Jesus (John 5:24). For some people, “the wrath of Almighty God” is a strange description of a loving God. The first Bible verse many people learned was probably John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one

and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” How can a God of love become a God of wrath?

God’s wrath is *not* vengeance or getting even for not being obeyed or appreciated. God is a God of justice. “Whom did he [the LORD] consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice?” (Isaiah 40:14, NRSV). The answer is obviously “No one!” “He evenhandedly rewards good, and he does not ignore the sins of any.... At the same time, God rarely delivers instant justice” (Shogren 1996, 440). God’s motives are pure, and He is absolutely just in His treatment of His created beings. A wicked man may go to his grave, never repenting, and never having paid a price for his abuse of others. But he will still be judged and punished for every unforgiven sin he may have committed on the innocent. Likewise, a believer may unjustly go to the grave, victimized and destroyed by evil persons. But rewards for faithful saints not received in this life will be handed out at the Judgment Seat of Christ for the believers.

It is in the Tribulation that God, before the entire world, will begin His long overdue judgment of evil. The wicked who have died before the Tribulation will be resurrected to receive their just penalty at the Great White Throne Judgment.

We will frequently be mentioning, as the Bible also does, “the wrath of God.” But we must always remember that God’s wrath is not at all like human wrath. The dictionary definition of human wrath is “a strong enraged feeling expressed vehemently and accompanied by bitterness, malignancy, or condemnation” (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*). God’s wrath, however, comes from His sense of justice, not from an enraged feeling of vengeance. We agree with Abraham’s conviction that the LORD, as Judge of all the earth, will do right (Genesis 18:23).

What does it mean to trust in the Lord?

The Psalms are filled with encouragement to trust in the Lord. The wise man Solomon gave us the most eloquent admonition: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5–6).

The currency of the United States of America has the inscription, “IN GOD WE TRUST.” If only that were true! And if only it were true in all nations of the world! Unfortunately, not just nations, but also peoples (some who call themselves Christians) confess the words, but place their trust in many other things. Do we trust God more than we trust the government that protects us, the doctors and medicines that are intended to keep us healthy, or the employer who provides us a regular paycheck? Of course, we can

trust both, but we must never forget, “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes” (Psalm 118:8–9).

Trust in God brings “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). Trust in God, according to King David, brings hope (Psalm 71:5). The Blessed Hope of Christ’s glorious appearing (Titus 2:13) is reserved for those who trust in the Lord with all their might.

7.2

Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream: The End-Time in Historical Perspective

If you grew up in a Bible believing church, particularly one that was evangelical, you no doubt remember the Bible account of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the statue with a head of pure gold, chest and arms of silver, thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of a mixture of iron and clay. Then a rock came out of nowhere, striking and demolishing the statue. The rock became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. At the time, you probably did not know that the story was important to Bible prophecy. But Daniel’s faithful interpretation of the dream, even while a captive in godless Babylon, introduces us to yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecies in the Book of Daniel.

Indicate the importance of the book of Daniel to end-time events.

The Book of Daniel and End-Time Prophecy

Almost every book of the Bible has at least a mention of future events in God’s plan for the world. Some of the events prophesied have already happened (like the birth and ministry of Jesus), while many have yet to be fulfilled. There is prophecy in the **Pentateuch**, the books of history and poetry, the major and minor prophets, the Gospels, the epistles, and Revelation. Of the entire sixty-six books, Daniel and Revelation stand out as the primary prophetic books of the Bible.

Although you can study this course by going through each lesson in sequence, your study would be enriched if you read through the book of Daniel before proceeding further. You will find fresh inspiration in the Sunday school stories of Daniel in the lions’ den, the three Hebrew men preserved in the intense heat of the fiery furnace, or Daniel’s God-given ability to interpret dreams. If you want to press ahead immediately into Daniel’s

treatment of end-time events, begin your reading with chapter 7. On one occasion, the angel Gabriel (Daniel's guide through his visions) reassures Daniel, "I am going to tell you what will happen later in the time of wrath, because the vision concerns the appointed time of the end" (Daniel 8:19). Having read the end-time prophecy portion of Daniel, you will be better able to follow our approach in this study. Then, after you complete your eschatology study, you can reread Daniel with better understanding.

Explain which historical empires are represented in the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Symbolism of the Statue in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

In our study of prophecy, we must recognize that some who are considered scholars of the Bible do not believe in the supernatural, nor in detailed accounts of events before they happen. Consequently, contrary to proven manuscript dating, they place the date of writing after the events have happened, or interpret the future event as something that happened before the prophecy was written. High critical scholars use this approach. These scholars date the writing of Daniel around 170 B.C. (rather than the sixth century B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar actually lived). "If Daniel wrote in the sixth century B.C., as conservative scholars have maintained, then it is a powerful example of predictive prophecy. However, if Daniel is dated around 170 B.C., as many higher critical scholars argue, he is writing history and not prophecy. One of the great arguments for the supernatural origin of biblical prophecy is then lost" (Geisler 1999, 178).

What kingdoms/nations are represented in the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

In interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel tells the king that the golden head of the statue refers to him (Daniel 2:38). Daniel's interpretation further suggests that the chest and arms of silver represent the Medo-Persian Empire while the belly and thighs of bronze point to the Greek Empire. Iron legs stand for the Roman Empire, and feet of iron and baked clay signify a mixture of people not united. In a parallel vision of a two-horned ram and a shaggy goat, the horns of the ram represent the kings of Media and Persia and the shaggy goat the king of Greece (Daniel 8:20–21). These nations existed when Daniel saw the visions, but they had not yet risen to the status of world powers. When Alexander

the Great died unexpectedly at the age of thirty-three, the empire was divided among four of his generals (the four horns). This prophecy is so exact that it causes doubting critics to call the visions historical reporting rather than prophetic utterance.

Though the iron part of the statue is not identified, the Roman Empire followed Greece as the next world power. Since the fall of the Roman Empire, history has recorded a variety (or mixture) of democracies and dictatorships that we have even today. Horton (1996) makes an important observation about the empires in Daniel's vision: "Even though one empire gives way to another, they are all part of the same statue, the same world system. There is never a really new world order until the statue is destroyed and every remnant of it blown away. The present world system still bears the marks of the empires that preceded it. We still have Babylonian idolatry and love of luxury. Medo-Persian ... ethic of good works ... modern philosophy [from Greek philosophy, and] ... Roman law and Roman ideas of might makes right" (94).

The rock cut out of a mountain, without human hands, strikes the statue in the feet, not in the upper parts of image. The rock is Christ. The statue, when struck, is not crippled, the entire statue is shattered. Then we read the prophetic meaning: "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (Daniel 2:44). George Frederick Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" proclaims it majestically: "The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, . . . ; and He shall reign for ever and ever." We can see why it is called "The Hallelujah Chorus."

Explain Daniel's imagery of the four beasts and the little horn.

The Four Beasts and the Little Horn

The four beasts that rise out of the sea (Daniel 7) are parallels of the four body parts of the statue in Daniel 2. The lion with wings of an eagle represents Nebuchadnezzar's empire, Babylon. The bear is the Medo-Persian empire. The swift leopard with four wings represents the speed with which Alexander the Great expanded the Greek empire. The fourth beast is not named, but is the most terrible and powerful of the four beasts. As the legs of the statue probably represent the Roman empire, the fourth beast with ten horns is often viewed as a representation of both the original Roman empire and an end-time revived Roman empire.

An eleventh horn, identified as “a little one,” uproots three of the ten horns and defies God.

“He will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. But ... his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him” (Daniel 7:24–27).

The interpretation of many conservative scholars is that the little horn is Antichrist, who will rule with violence and oppression during the Tribulation. But the Father (the Ancient of Days) gives authority, glory, and sovereign power to Christ (the Rock of Daniel 2), who defeats Antichrist and sets up an everlasting Kingdom (Daniel 7:13–14). Again, Daniel describes the kingdom of this world becoming “the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ.” Hallelujah!

Clarify the meaning of Daniel's Seventy Weeks.

Daniel's Seventy Weeks

“The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time” (Daniel 7:25). (In this passage, “him” is interpreted to be the Antichrist). To describe a time period in this fashion is strange for the modern mind. But scholars have determined that such terminology means: time (one year), times (two years), and half a time (half a year) for a total of 3½ years, or one-half of the seven-year Tribulation. This brings us to what is called “Daniel's Seventy Weeks.”

Why did Daniel fast and pray when he read
Jeremiah 29:10?

During the reign of Darius the Mede, Daniel observed something special in the book of Jeremiah. “I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes” (Daniel 9:2–3; compare Jeremiah 29:10).

While Daniel prayed, confessing his sin and the sins of his people Israel, the angel Gabriel again came to him. Assuring Daniel that his prayer had been answered and he would be given insight and understanding, Gabriel spoke these words: “Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens’ [or weeks of years], and sixty-two ‘sevens’ [or weeks of years].... After the sixty-two ‘sevens’ [weeks of years], the Anointed One will be cut off.... The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven’ [or a week of years]. In the middle of the ‘seven’ [or week of years] he will put an end to sacrifice and offering” (Daniel 9:25–27). And just as time means “year” in Daniel 7:25, a week [of years] means “seven years.” So the seventy weeks are actually 490 years.

Details of the seventy weeks of years will be treated in later lessons. But in looking at the computation of years, a careful study of Old and New Testament eschatology seems to indicate that a gap exists between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of years. The sixty-ninth week ended with the Anointed One (Christ) being cut off. The seventieth week is the tribulation of seven years. The gap is the church age in which we now live. This unmentioned time gap is common in Bible prophecy. For example, the Old Testament prophecy of Christ’s first coming as a baby is tied closely with His second coming to rule in the Millennium: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders” (Isaiah 9:6). The government was not on Jesus’ shoulders during His earthly presence, but it will be in the Millennium. (See also Zechariah 9:9–10 and Isaiah 61:1–2.) The exact fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy centuries before it actually happened is a confirmation that the yet unfulfilled prophecies will still come to pass. Our God reigns over the affairs of humankind!

7.3

Alternate Views of the Tribulation

Scripture tells us, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). And that hope lies in understanding our future with Christ. We believe the prophecies in the Bible are to be interpreted literally, unless the surrounding context clearly indicates otherwise. Yet others students of the Bible may interpret biblical prophecies differently. We must not be arrogant about our beliefs, nor dogmatic about our understanding of what God has planned for our future. Just as biblical prophecy already fulfilled proves the meaning and truth of the earlier predictions, so will God’s

fulfillment of Bible prophecies not yet fulfilled prove the exact meaning of their predictions.

In sharing our faith and understanding of the Bible, we must know what those who disagree with us may believe. On the liberal side of the theological spectrum, God's supernatural intervention in regard to predictive prophecy is minimized or dismissed altogether. So the first question that must be asked in any dialogue about the future fulfillment of biblical prophecy is "Do you believe God has inspired predicting the future in Scripture?" If such miracles are believed to be impossible, then predicting the future is impossible. If a person does not believe in an omniscient God who knows the events of the future and can reveal them as He chooses, then that person must explain away predictive statements in Scripture. This would include explaining away predictions of final judgment where human beings are held accountable to God. Biblical references to the future are described as being vague or applying only to something in the writer's lifetime. A person who rejects the ability of an omnipotent personal God to inspire predictive statements in Scripture must reject the accountability of human beings to God to be consistent. Of course, knowing the future is beyond the ability of finite humans, but not beyond the ability of God.

There are also those who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture and in God's miraculous intervention in inspiring predictive Scripture, but who hold differing viewpoints on how some passages should be interpreted. Since the future is not yet here, one should not be argumentative or dogmatic in these areas. Some interpreters rely heavily on symbolic interpretations of various prophetic passages. This will affect one's view of the Tribulation.

As we become familiar with the various alternate views of the Tribulation, we can give a better answer for the hope we have, and do it with gentleness and respect.

Define the preterist, historicist, and idealist views of the Tribulation.

Preterist, Historicist, and Idealist Views of the Tribulation

The **preterist view of prophecy** sees biblical prophecy as having been fulfilled in the first century, especially with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. From this perspective, Roman emperor Nero is sometimes seen as the beast or antichrist. Those who hold this view of biblical prophecy must date the writing of Revelation before 70 A.D., since the Tribulation descriptions are recorded as future. Rather than applying the prophetic descriptions to the believers of all centuries down to the present, the preterist

view teaches that Bible prophecy is a symbolic presentation of the conflicts and persecutions of early Christians in the first century. This view leans heavily on symbolic interpretations of Bible prophecy. The preterist view sees only historical interest today in Daniel and Revelation.

The **historicist view** of biblical prophecy sees prophecy as having been gradually fulfilled throughout church history, rather than in the first century alone. Those who hold this view seek to find parallels between events of church history and the descriptions of Revelation. As in the preterist view, symbolism is a central aspect of interpretation. Of course, symbolism can be difficult to interpret in prophetic passages, and as a result, interpretations may vary widely. Many Protestant interpreters over the years have applied the symbolism to the papacy of the Roman Catholic church, or to the Muslim invasions of the Middle Ages. This approach to interpreting biblical prophecy demands that each new generation add their world to the picture and reevaluate previous meanings of the symbolism. The subjective nature of the historicist view of biblical prophecy should make plain its deficiencies.

A third alternative view of biblical prophecy is sometimes called the **idealist or spiritual view**. Horton (1991) describes persons who hold this view: “They take an idealist view of the book and think that the symbols and figures in the book simply represent the ongoing struggle between good and evil, with assurance of the ultimate triumph of righteousness. They see no literal fulfillment of anything in the book [of Revelation]” (19). Although this view claims to spiritualize the details of biblical prophecy, the symbolic figures all represent some reality. The Antichrist may not be a literal beast, but his actions are certainly bestial.

Payne (1973) gives an example of how these three views (and the futurist view yet to be covered] would interpret an item found in “the four horsemen of the Apocalypse” passage of Revelation 6. The rider of the third horse, a black horse, “was holding a pair of scales in his hand” (6:5). By the symbol of the weighing scales, “the preterist would comprehend a famine in the days of ancient Rome; the historicalist would envisage famines throughout subsequent history, the futurist would have recourse to a famine during a not-yet-arrived ‘great tribulation’; while the **allegorizer** [idealist or spiritualizer] might think of some spiritual famine, of hunger for the word of God—or for almost anything else. This last feature indicates, indeed, the essential subjectivity and hence illegitimacy of allegorized interpretations” (593–594).

Explain why the futurist Tribulation view is reliable and true to Scripture.

The Futurist View of Bible Prophecy

In what ways have misguided futurists weakened the premise of this view?

Walvoord (1999) declares, “The futuristic view offers the only solid basis for consistent verifiable form of interpretation” (521). There is little disagreement with the fact that the majority of early church believers were futurists. They believed that Christ’s statements about the future would come to pass. They looked to the future and believed that Christ’s return was imminent—that it could happen at any time (Matthew 24:42–44). With this understanding the Tribulation judgments described in Revelation 5:1 through 19:21 would be seen as future events, in which God pours out His wrath on a world that has rejected Christ. Horton notes, “The world and Satan bring tribulation on the church in this age. During the Great Tribulation, God will be bringing wrath and judgment on a Christ-rejecting world” (1991, 19).

Unfortunately for the reputation of the futurist view, a few overzealous proponents have engaged in speculation and interpretation that is obviously unbiblical. Some have set dates for the time of the Rapture. One publication that circulated widely in futurist circles was titled, “88 Reasons Why Jesus Will Return in 1988.” Going back to the early 19th century, William Miller, founder of a religious group called “Millerites,” calculated from his study of Daniel and Revelation, that Jesus would come back and take his group of followers sometime between March 1843 and 1844. Many of the followers sold their farms and homes, and left their employment to get ready and to warn others of the coming Rapture. Such disobedience to the clear statement of Scripture (Mark 13:32–33) hurts rather than helps the cause of Christ. The yet unfulfilled biblical prophecies will literally be fulfilled in God’s end-time schedule. Our sole responsibility is to “be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matthew 24:44). That is all we need to know.

Another very questionable activity of a few futurists is the naming of a current world figure as the possible Antichrist. Some have suggested that the one who will fulfill the Antichrist role may already be alive as a younger person in Israel, a European country, etc. Such proclamations may be prompted by an attempt to remind Christians that Jesus really may be coming soon. But true believers should be living expecting Jesus to come at any time. The non-Christian world, not knowing the background for the statement, may view such comments as mean-spirited and even hateful.

Current events of widespread human suffering or tragedy may provoke a fresh interest in biblical prophecy. But what is of ultimate importance is that those suffering from such devastation are souls for whom Christ died. He may well be saying to us today, as He told

His disciples about the coming judgment of saints and sinners, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Reports were received that many Muslims affected by the 2004 eastern hemisphere tsunami were touched by Christian assistance in their suffering, even while other Muslims remained hostile. Futurists must live in the here and now, as Christ’s hand extended, even as we look forward to His coming to take us to our eternal home.

Clarify the basis for our belief that believers will not go through the Tribulation.

What We Believe

From our study of the alternate views of biblical prophecy, we have learned that some scholars claim whatever Tribulation there might be has already happened. Others claim there will not be a Great Tribulation, so believers need not be concerned about such statements in Scripture. But we who take these descriptions of Bible prophecy as representations of actual future events believe that a terrible time is ahead for the inhabitants living on earth when it happens. Just as we believe these descriptions concern actual events, we also believe the promise that we will be raptured before the Great Tribulation is literal and true. We must continue to follow the admonition that we encourage one another by focusing attention on God’s loving care for His children: “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:9–11). We must not forget that the future is bright for the follower of Christ!

8

Active Groups and Individuals in the Tribulation

We will be referring often to evil and wickedness in this chapter. What do the two terms mean? We know that many who have died without accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior were not literally vile people. Is it right to call them wicked or evil? Or when we think of law-abiding neighbors who are friendly and kind, but make no profession of faith, we find it hard to call them evil or wicked. They just do not know Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives.

Evil is not always repulsive. Satan is sometimes seen as “an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). But the end of evil is destruction and damnation. Evil or wickedness is not defined according to the world’s standard of good and bad behavior. The prophet Isaiah recorded the message of the LORD Almighty: “They [Israel, His children] have no regard for the deeds of the LORD, no respect for the work of his hands. Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding; ... Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isaiah 5:12–13, 20).

Because “evil” or “wicked” may be misunderstood when applied to some non-believers, we may need to, in this context, adjust our use of these terms, especially when our focus becomes the reaching of the lost. God’s Word for the unsaved is simply, “all [who] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). In reality, all who miss the Rapture or the resurrection of the righteous at the same time will be the wicked who go into the Tribulation. Second Thessalonians 3:2 tells us that wicked and evil men are those who do not have faith in Jesus Christ. Simply defined, evil or wickedness is the disobedient who reject the forgiveness offered by God and who continue in rebellion against His authority. And ignorance is no excuse (Titus 2:11).

Lesson 8.1 Major Figures in the Tribulation

Objectives

- 8.1.1 *Define the roles of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet in the Tribulation.*
- 8.1.2 *Specify the role of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11.*
- 8.1.3 *Identify the 144,000 who are sealed in the Tribulation (Revelation 7:1–4).*
- 8.1.4 *Describe the ministry of angels in the Tribulation.*

Lesson 8.2 Antichrist: Personification of Evil

Objectives

- 8.2.1 *Explain the significance of the title Antichrist.*

8.2.2 *Explain the meaning of “the mark of the beast.”*

8.2.3 *Describe the danger of naming a living person as the coming Antichrist.*

Lesson 8.3 The Nation of Israel in the End-time

Objectives

8.3.1 *Point out God’s faithfulness in dealing with Israel.*

8.3.2 *Examine New Testament evidence for the restoration of Israel.*

8.3.3 *Explain the meaning of “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26).*

8.1

Major Figures in the Tribulation

Born-again believers are familiar with the three members of the Holy Trinity. Father God is the loving Sovereign who, seeing the great need of fallen humans, gave His only Son to die that we might have eternal life. Since Jesus walked on earth in human form, He knows the impact of our tests and temptations and is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15). The Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus. “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever” (John 14:16). We will have fellowship with all three members of the Trinity throughout the ages to come.

But there is a group of characters, an evil triad that will emerge on earth after the saints have been raptured. One of the three, Satan, we know only too well. The others are described in biblical prophecy.

Define the roles of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet in the Tribulation.

The Evil Triad: Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet

What will Satan’s role be during the Tribulation?

Satan in the Hebrew language means “adversary, or one who resists.” He is obviously God’s adversary, but he is also the believer’s enemy who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). He is also the accuser of the saints. He “accuses them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10). He is also called the devil, which means “a slanderer.” During the Tribulation, Satan is the spirit force behind the Antichrist, empowering the evil deeds of the world leader. At the end of the Tribulation, Satan, through deception, will gather and lead the armies of many nations against the returning Christ. Satan is described symbolically as “the great dragon” and “that ancient serpent” (Revelation 12:9).

In comparing the holy trinity with the **evil triad** (Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet), we must remember that this evil triad is not equal to God. The evil triad are created beings, while God alone is the Creator, and all powerful. The Father’s opponent in this comparison would be Satan, a fallen angel. God originally created the angels to praise and glorify Him. “Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts.... Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created” (Psalm 148:2, 5). One of those created angels was described in Ezekiel 28. From the comparison with the king of Tyre, the indication is that this angelic being was created to fill a high place of honor and power among the angels. But in a spirit of pride he rebelled against God. “ ‘So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings’ ” (Ezekiel 28:16–17).

That rebellion preceding the fall of Adam and Eve is a foundational point for end-time prophecy. With the same objective, Satan or the devil still aspires to dethrone God. It seems as though he would know that he cannot succeed, but that makes him all the more vicious. “Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (Revelation 12:12). Satan’s last great effort to cripple and destroy God’s kingdom takes place after the rapture of the saints. Thank God, believers will be spared the suffering and destruction the inhabitants of earth will experience in the Tribulation as the righteous Kingdom collides with this world’s evil kingdom. In the end, after Satan is finally defeated, we will join the heavenly chorus shouting, “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns” (Revelation 19:6).

In the evil triad, the Antichrist appears in stark opposition to Christ in the holy Trinity. Antichrist is a savage beast, whereas Christ is a sacrificial Lamb. In Christ’s earthly ministry, He received power from the Father (Matthew 28:18); Antichrist, referred to as the beast in Revelation 13:1–8, will receive his power from Satan (Revelation 13:2). Antichrist deliberately seeks to imitate the true Christ, and diverts worship away from Christ (Revelation 13:8). Yet he will be defeated in the end.

Antichrist will be “a master of intrigue.... He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and

he will consider himself superior” (Daniel 8:23–25). We will study Antichrist in greater detail in the next lesson.

The False Prophet is the third member of the evil triad. This second beast, the one that comes up out of the earth, seems to echo the role of the Holy Spirit in the true Trinity. The false prophet glorifies Antichrist (Revelation 13:12). The Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost baptized with “what seemed to be tongues of fire” (Acts 2:4). The false prophet performs “great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men” (Revelation 13:13). The false prophet is mentioned three times after this first appearance in Revelation: 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10.

Specify the role of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelations 11.

The Two Witnesses

Why are the two witnesses preaching God’s message after the Rapture?

There is much controversy over the identity of the two witnesses. Some think they will be Enoch and Elijah, the two Old Testament individuals who did not die, but were translated. Others feel they will be Elijah and Moses. God said, “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes” (Malachi 4:5). God buried Moses when he died, and no one knew where his grave was (Deuteronomy 34:5). Also, Elijah and Moses appeared to Jesus and three disciples on the mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). However, while such speculations loom, the identity of the two witnesses is not critical. The two are on a mission from God. As they witness for 1,260 days (Revelation 11:3), or half of the Tribulation, they share God’s truth with power and clarity.

Why does God allow the two witnesses to be killed?

Yet they are killed by a beast, possibly a fallen angel from the bottomless pit (11:7). Their bodies lie in the streets of Jerusalem for 3 1/2 half days, while the inhabitants of earth make merry and exchange gifts to celebrate their death (11:10).

The message of the witnesses has been delivered. The evil inhabitants of the earth have demonstrated that the judgment coming upon them is just. They stubbornly reject their chance to join the winning side. The end of the witnesses is vindication of them and their message. As the 3 1/2 days come to an end, the two witnesses stand to their feet, resurrected by the Spirit of God (11:11). A voice from heaven invites them to “Come.” Their enemies watch in awe as they ascend in a cloud (11:12).

*Identify the 144,000 who are sealed in the Tribulation
(Revelation 7:1–4).*

The One Hundred and Forty-four Thousand

The Tribulation is sometimes called “a time of trouble for Jacob [Israel]” (Jeremiah 30:7). It will indeed be a time of punishment for national disobedience and for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. But the 144,000 from twelve tribes of Israel will be saved (Revelation 7:4, Romans 11:26). The hardened, disobedient Jews, like all individuals, will certainly be judged. But the faithful remnant will then be “all Israel.” In the midst of the judgments, as the seals are opened (Revelation 6), we are introduced to 144,000 who are described later as redeemed, pure and undefiled, and blameless (Revelation 14:3–5).

Horton (1996) provides insights into the role of the 144,000: “Some Bible scholars speculate that the 144,000 will be commissioned and anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel during the early part of the Tribulation. They do not seem to be present, however, when the sixth trumpet sounds (Rev. 9:20) or when the two witnesses are active on earth (Rev. 11:10). It may be that they are martyred, or perhaps taken into heaven” (106). Remember, all this is taking place on earth while the raptured saints are entering into wedding of the bride and Groom, and receiving rewards for faithfulness during life on earth.

*Describe the ministry of angels in the
Tribulation.*

Roles of Angels in the Tribulation

What are some of the things holy angels do during the Tribulation?

The role of angels, both good and evil, is often overlooked since they usually carry out the will of their superiors. But the number of references to angels, found in the book of Revelation alone, indicates their importance. The words “angel” or “angels” are used over 75 times, with pronouns for the terms increasing the number even more.

Most of the angels are nameless. However, Michael is named as leading a host of lesser angels into battle against Satan (Revelation 12:7). The fallen angels who followed Satan include one called Abaddon (Hebrew name) or Apollyon (Greek name), the evil angel of the abyss (Revelation 9:11).

How many holy angels are present to do the bidding of God during the Tribulation?

In a vision, John sees a massive number of holy angels around the throne in heaven, singing praises to Christ. “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne” (Revelation 5:11). Do not try to calculate an exact number from that description. “‘Ten thousand’ is a myriad, the largest number used in the ancient Greek language. Therefore, the myriads of myriads plus ‘thousands of thousands’ indicates that the number of angels was beyond human calculation” (Horton 1991, 91).

It must be noted, however, that in spite of their close affinity to God, angels are not to be worshipped (Revelation 22:8–9). God alone is to be worshipped.

8.2

Antichrist: Personification of Evil

You might wonder why we spend an entire lesson on the meanest person the world will ever know. True believers hope never to meet this personification of evil who will come to prominence in the Tribulation. Scripture portrays this terrible creature as a beast.

The apostle John saw the spirit of antichrist already in the world when he wrote his first two letters. “Just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared” (1 John 2:18, NASB). In his second letter, John identifies deception with the Antichrist: “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully” (2 John 1:7–8; see also 1 John 2:22). Though we do not have to worry today about the Antichrist of the Tribulation, we should be concerned about the anti-Christ deception that grows more and more as we draw near to the Rapture.

*Explain the significance of the title,
Antichrist.*

The Name and Nature of Antichrist

Antichrist, as the name suggests, is completely opposed to Christ. He is against Christ. He sets himself up as God. He seeks to be worshipped and served instead of, or in place of, Christ.

Antichrist is also referred to in Paul’s writings as “that man of sin” (KJV) or “the man of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, NIV). As Satan’s physical expression (2:9), he “will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (2:4). The demonic rebellion against God and His kingdom comes to a climax in the Tribulation.

How does the Antichrist
treat Israel?

Our understanding of Antichrist comes mainly from these biblical passages: Daniel 7:8–9, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12; and Revelation 13 and 17. (The unique language in Daniel 11:36–45 causes many scholars to believe reference is being made to both a historical person, that is Antiochus IV, as well as to the Antichrist of the last days.) Daniel describes Antichrist as “most terrifying” (7:19). “He will cause astounding devastation and

will succeed in whatever he does” (8:23). John describes Antichrist as a foul-mouthed braggart who blasphemes God and slanders heaven and its inhabitants (Revelation 13:5–6). The choice of beasts to represent those who oppose God in the end-time is very appropriate. Antichrist is the most vicious of beasts.

The evil nature of Antichrist brings evil actions. He makes a seven-year covenant with Israel, but then breaks the covenant after 3 1/2 years, insulting the Jews by placing a statue of himself (called “an abomination that causes desolation”) in a wing of the temple (Daniel 9:27). In Revelation 12, the woman (representing Israel) flees “into the wilderness” to a place “prepared for her by God” (12:6). Antichrist would certainly be part of the attempt to destroy all the faithful in Israel.

Explain the meaning of “the mark of the beast.”

More Than a Number

Paul tells much about Antichrist’s deceitful use of counterfeit miracles and signs, as well as the response of those who will follow any leader except the Lord Jesus Christ. “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12). When men and women consciously decide they will not obey Christ, they open themselves up to all kinds of danger, deception, and ultimate damnation.

What now restrains the rampant lawlessness that will rule in the Tribulation?

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, the Antichrist is referred to as “the lawless one” or “man of sin” (KJV). In the passage above, Antichrist is twice called “the lawless one.” A respect for God’s laws is essential to a righteous life. Yet even today people around the globe will do anything to avoid God’s law. Satan leads people to believe that freedom is living without any laws or restrictions. Antichrist speaks and behaves as he pleases. Daniel, calling

Antichrist a king, says,” The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods” (Daniel 11:36). He speaks ill of God because he refuses to obey God’s law. He is indeed a man of lawlessness. But the lawless life ends in destruction.

There is, however, a power that now holds back the rampant lawlessness which will rule in the Tribulation. “The secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way” (2 Thessalonians 2:7). Over the centuries, there have been many suggestions on the identity of this restraining person or thing. The Roman Empire, the emperor, the preaching of the apostles, Michael and the angels he leads have all been mentioned as possibilities. But pre-Tribulationists, including many evangelicals and Pentecostals, teach that the one holding back the lawlessness even now is either the Holy Spirit or the true church in which the Holy Spirit dwells.

But it is not the Holy Spirit who is taken out of the way (leaves the scene, or is swept out of the midst). During the church Age the Holy Spirit is working through believers. Paul calls our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). When believers come together as an assembly, they also are the temple of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). Thus, there is no reason why the masculine word of John 16:7 could not refer to the true believers who will be taken out of the way, caught up in the Rapture. This fits the facts which indicate that the Rapture will take place before the Antichrist is revealed. As believers we look for Jesus Christ, not the Antichrist. (Horton 1996, 113)

There has probably been more interest and discussion about “the mark of the beast” than about any other detail of end-time prophecy. The description of the mark is found in the passage of the beast coming out of the earth (the false prophet) rather than the beast coming out of the sea (Antichrist). But the mark most likely refers to Antichrist, for whom the false prophet sets up the system that will require the mark on the right hand or on the forehead, “so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:17). Accepting the mark will mean complete submission to Antichrist and his rebellion against God, ending all chance of being accepted as a follower of Jesus Christ.

What does the number
666 mean?

It is the next verse that invites endless and needless speculation. “This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666” (Revelation 13:18). Calling for wisdom is not an invitation to determine the identity of Antichrist. *The wisdom is needed to distinguish between a man,*

no matter how super-human he may appear to be, and Christ, the true supernatural Deity (Italics added). Horton (1996) notes, “Since 666 ‘is a man’s [a human being’s] number’ (Rev. 13:18), it is somehow identified with the fact that the antichrist claims to be God but is really just a man. But by the demand that all take the mark on the right hand or forehead he will gain economic control and become the dictator of the whole world” (117).

Describe the danger of naming a living person as the coming Antichrist.

The Danger of Naming Antichrist

Though we as believers are looking for Jesus rather than for the Antichrist, believers with good intentions have speculated wildly about who the Antichrist might be. Throughout the church Age there has been a tendency to call a contemporary tyrannical figure the Antichrist. It all began with Nero in the first century, and has included popes and dictators who have done evil things toward some groups. A few have even felt that a resurrected Judas Iscariot will be the Antichrist. The number of Antichrist (666) has been applied to letters in Hebrew and Greek to name a contemporary world-renowned leader. There is frequent speculation that the one who will eventually be revealed as Antichrist is already alive, but not yet risen to power.

Some students of prophecy speculate on the nationality of Antichrist. Some claim he will be a Jew because of the Old Testament statement, “He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers” (Daniel 11:37). A large number of students of the Bible, however, believe that the Antichrist will be a Gentile. The ten horns and the little horn (Antichrist) are believed to be symbolic of the Roman Empire. “This is the final empire of Gentile civilization, that eventually swallows up all other great powers. In the final period of his power there will be given to the leader of this ten-horned Roman confederacy ‘authority over every tribe, people, language and nation’ (Rev. 13:7)” (Hoyt 1969, 126). Serious students of prophecy are not dogmatic on these issues. Disputes over future unknowns discredit the cause of Christ. We are not waiting for Antichrist; we are looking for the true Christ, who will deliver us from the atrocities of Antichrist.

8.3

The Nation of Israel in the End-time

Israel plays an important role in end-time prophecy. Both Old and New Testaments have much to say about God's chosen people. We owe much to them, even though most Jews today are not followers of Jesus, their true Messiah. Our Bible, God's Word to all humankind, was written primarily by Jewish people. Jesus came to earth as a Jewish Messiah.

God's love for Israel precedes Israel becoming a nation. God's plan for redeeming the human race included forming a nation that would impact the world. So he picked Abraham and Sarah to be the seed for the nation through which His Word would be written and His salvation provided. When God told Abraham that he and Sarah were the chosen couple, they were well past the normal age of having children. "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Knowing that Sarah's age was not suitable for child bearing, they tried to help God fulfill His promise. Sarah offered her young maid, Hagar, to provide the promised heir. And Ishmael was born. But that was not God's plan. The miracle of Isaac's birth to ninety-year-old Sarah was the fulfillment of God's promise.

What God has promised for the restoration of Israel does not need our help, only our faith that God is at work. Like Sarah, we can at times make matters worse. In our defense of today's wayward Israel, we can be perceived as blindly taking a position without fully understanding the consequences. Israel will be restored, and many will come to know Christ as their Messiah. So we now support Israel without supporting unchristian actions that may come from unbelieving Jews.

Point out God's faithfulness in dealing with Israel.

God's Undying Love for Israel

What does belief that the church has replaced Israel in end-time prophecy tell us about a person's understanding of God.

The first century church believed in the restoration of Israel through God's divine blessing. But when Jews were scattered abroad to many countries of the world, students of the Bible began to wonder. Maybe the promises about a glorious future for Israel were

now being adjusted by God, so the church was the real beneficiary of the prophecies. And now, centuries later, there are those who firmly believe that the church has replaced Israel. Every mention of a future glorious Israel, they claim, should be rephrased and applied to the church.

Teaching that the church has replaced Israel, even though a restored Israel is clearly described in Bible prophecy, is based on a unique interpretation of the relevant Bible passages. To hold the replacement view, it seems one must believe that Daniel and John, and other prophets, did not fully comprehend what God was saying to them, or that God did not fully disclose His plans for the future. It also suggests that God's promises may be altered by collective human choices. What does the Bible teach about the future of Israel?

The glorious future Israel has been promised is not fulfilled until after the Tribulation. Israel's glorious future will be in the Millennium, which we will study later. At this point we are looking at the Tribulation, and those seven years will be anything but glorious for Jews. In fact, the Bible refers to the Tribulation as a time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7) or Israel's trouble. Many Jews will side with the Antichrist against Christ. They will be destroyed along with all the other Christ-rejecting followers of Antichrist. But there will be a remnant of Jews who come to realize that Jesus is the Messiah, and that Antichrist has deceived them with his counterfeit miracles and persuasive speech. But these will suffer severe persecution. The Tribulation will indeed be a dark time for Israel.

The intensity of Satan's hatred for the Jews is seen in John's vision recorded in Revelation 12. He saw "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth" (vv. 1–2). Bible scholars agree that this woman represents the faithful in Israel, and the child to whom she is about to give birth represents Jesus. The twelve stars in her crown represent the twelve tribes of Israel. The 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel (discussed in the last lesson) preach the gospel with the anointing of the Holy Spirit during the first half of the Tribulation.

The vision then shifts to another scene in heaven. There appeared "an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born" (12:3–4). Satan is the red dragon. He has been carrying hatred toward God since the day he was cursed for causing Eve to sin (Genesis 3:14).

God looks out for Israel and His Son. "She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days" (Revelation 5–6). Satan's purpose is to destroy the Son who thwarted his evil plan at Calvary.

Why was Satan in heaven at this time?

War ensues in heaven between Satan with his fallen angels and Michael with his holy angels. Satan and his angels are hurled to the earth, never again to be found in heaven (Revelation 12:7–9).

The book of Job records Satan coming before the LORD and accusing Job of serving God for the blessings he received (Job 1:9–10). Satan evidently still has that privilege of accusing the saints before God. But the event John sees is the last time Satan ever accuses any believer. A loud voice in heaven gives praise to God saying, “The accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:10–11). Satan’s evil is soon to end.

Examine New Testament evidence for the restoration of Israel.

The New Testament’s Support of the Prophecy

Israel’s restoration as a people must be preceded by a spiritual restoration. This future restoration is first mentioned in the Old Testament. “ ‘The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts’ ” (Jeremiah 31:31–33). A new covenant that puts God’s law in their minds and writes it on their hearts is indeed a spiritual restoration. This new covenant will be fulfilled after Israel’s suffering in the Tribulation, when the people finally return to the land promised to them (Jeremiah 30:1–7, 31:1–14).

What is the relationship between the Bible’s reference to Israel’s new covenant and the new covenant believers celebrate each time they partake of Holy Communion?

The writer of Hebrews repeats the “new covenant” passage in Jeremiah almost word for word, ending the quotation with “I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (8:8–10). The new covenant with Israel is echoed in Hebrews 10:16, with the addition, “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more” (10:17).

Believers celebrate the new covenant every time they partake of Holy Communion. “After supper he [Jesus] took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25). Walvoord (1993) gives a comprehensive explanation of “new covenant,” in relation to Jews and Gentiles: “Christ’s death provided a gracious promise of salvation, forgiveness, and blessing to all who are properly related to Him. The church finds this fulfillment in the present age. Israel will find it in the millennial kingdom. The important distinction is that the present fulfillment for the church is not sufficient to fulfill what is prophesied for Israel in the millennial kingdom” (87). The new covenant is for believers now (both Jew and Gentile) and Jewish believers who find Christ as their Savior/Messiah during the Tribulation. Both groups are included in the one new covenant, but become participants at different times.

*Explain the meaning of “all Israel will be saved”
(Romans 11:26).*

Israel’s Salvation

What is meant by the phrase “all Israel will be saved”
(Romans 11:26)?

The Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths includes the statement, “This millennial reign will bring the salvation of national Israel (Ezek. 37:21–22; Zeph. 3:19–20; Rom. 11:26–27)” (Statement 14. The Millennial Reign of Christ). The actual acceptance of Christ as Savior/Messiah by a remnant of individual Jews will take place in the Tribulation. As a nation, however, redeemed Israel will fill a leadership role in the Millennium. We will look at Israel’s role in the Millennium later.

Though the statement, “all Israel will be saved” does not mention salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, that must be the meaning. “Salvation is found in no one else [but

Jesus Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Horton (1996) explains, “The believers, along with the godly people of Israel in ancient times, will be the ‘all Israel’ who will be saved” (176). Jewish and Gentile believers will be one in Christ!

9

The Judgments in Revelation

The subject for our study in this chapter is not the most edifying or inspiring. In fact, it is quite the opposite. We will be looking at corporal punishment on a massive scale. Some people, supposedly for humanitarian reasons, are opposed to the death penalty for crimes committed. But there is no greater crime than rejecting and mocking the love and grace (unmerited favor) offered by the One who gave us physical life and then offers us eternal life.

As we begin this study, we should run an attitude check. Repeat checks should be made throughout the chapter. Which response will go through your heart and mind as you comprehend what you read? Are you happy that sinners will finally get their just reward? Are you inclined to think these judgments are so horrendous that they must be exaggerated symbols? Or do you feel the compassion of Christ—not willing that any should perish—even for those who knowingly reject the free offer of salvation? Do you burn with a passion to reach as many as possible for Christ, to rescue them from being lost without Christ.

We must also be reminded, as we have noted earlier, that God’s wrath in the Tribulation judgments is not prompted by vengeance or by a desire to get even for being rejected or ignored. Divine judgment is required by God’s attribute of divine justice. Instead, we should marvel at the fact that God has been so patient in giving humankind countless opportunities to understand and accept His sacrifice for their salvation.

Lesson 9.1 John’s Vision of the Seven Seals of Judgment

Objectives

9.1.1 Indicate the significance and results of the broken seals.

9.1.2 Describe what happens between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals.

Lesson 9.2 John’s Vision of the Seven Trumpets of Judgment

Objective

9.2.1 Explain the significance of the seven trumpet judgments.

Lesson 9.3 John’s Vision of the Seven Bowls of Judgment

Objectives

9.3.1 Summarize the events on earth as the bowl judgments are poured out.

9.3.2 Describe the response of heaven and earth’s inhabitants to the bowl judgments.

9.1

John's Vision of the Seven Seals of Judgment

The opening of six of the seven seals is described in Revelation 6. But the previous chapter in Revelation provides important background. John records his vision: "I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne [God] a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?' But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it" (Revelation 5:1–3). John weeps, but an elder steps forward and says to John, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals" (5:5).

Why does the book have seven seals?

The seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments were three groupings of seven judgments each. The number three can refer to the Trinity (divine judgment) and the number seven to divine perfection. The numbers would suggest to early church readers that the descriptions in Revelation were indeed divine judgments, and not from Satan or portends of natural disasters.

Indicate the significance and results of the broken seals.

The Breaking of the Seven Seals

We are not told the contents of the book that only Christ can open. One suggestion is that it contains future events no one can know except God. The judgments that are about to follow could be part of that future. If the seven seals indicate the book as a will, Jewish believers might have understood it to be the title deed to their Promised Land and the Lamb's title deed to the kingdoms of the world. The judgments that follow will increase in intensity as time progresses.

When during the Tribulation do the judgments take place?

Once again, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is the central figure in Revelation and in all of end-time prophecy. He alone is worthy. He gave His life for our redemption and rose from the grave as victor over death. He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The First Seal—the horseman of conquest (Revelation 6:1–2)

Some Bible students have seen Christ as the rider on a white horse, possibly because He comes back to earth riding a white horse (Revelation 19:11–13). But since Christ has been opening the seals, that identification would be confusing here. Also, the horsemen in the next three seals are obviously evil. Others identify Antichrist as the rider. Only one of the four horsemen is named (Death, in seal four), so it is more likely that all the riders are symbols here. Yet they stand for real truths. Dictators have often lusted for power through deception and conquest. But it will be more vicious in the Tribulation.

The Second Seal—the horseman of warfare (6:3–4)

The red horse of the second rider reminds us of the bloody nature of war. Commanders of armies destroy peace wherever they go. Threats turn to slaughter and then mass graves of fallen soldiers and civilians. Though we see enough of killing today, the intensity of war in the Tribulation will be many times worse.

The Third Seal—the horseman of famine (6:5–6)

The black horse is a symbol of suffering and hunger. The balances in the rider’s hands can measure out the limited amount of essential foods. The areas of the world currently ravaged by famine are nothing compared to the worldwide famine of God’s judgment during the Tribulation.

The Fourth Seal—the horseman of death (6:7–8)

Do the fourth seal judgments involve any human activities?

Riding on the back of a ghastly pale horse is a rider with a name: Death. With Hades (or hell) following close behind, this is not just death from old age. Unusual deaths over a

quarter of the earth, by murder, massacre, famine, and plagues will send the wicked to hell.

With the fourth seal, plagues and epidemics are unleashed that wipe out large numbers of people. The “sword” may refer again to deaths caused by war. The God who created our universe also has access to elements that can bring powerful judgment to a rebellious world. Here the judgments of the four horsemen of the apocalypse are finished.

The Fifth Seal—Martyrs Under the Altar (6:9–11)

The opening of the fifth seal may not seem to be a judgment, but it explains why judgment of the wicked is necessary. Some who have missed the Rapture will turn to Christ during this time and confess Him. But as a result of their confession they will give their lives as martyrs. “Under the altar” speaks of shedding their blood and being counted with the righteous. However, it is the blood of Jesus, not their blood, that saves them. When they ask, “How long ... until you ... avenge our blood?” they are actually asking, “When will you come ‘from heaven in blazing fire ... [to] punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus’ ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8). But there are still more martyrs to join them before the Tribulation is over.

The Sixth Seal—the Wrath of the Lamb (6:12–17)

We regularly hear news reports of earthquakes around the world. Some come with great loss of life at the center of the quake. The “great earthquake” seen at the opening of the sixth seal is a shudder at the heart of the earth and felt at the surface around the world. Such an earthquake would activate volcanoes and lava flows and cause cosmic disturbances. Falling stars are likely showers of meteorites. The smoke from gigantic volcanic eruptions could easily darken the sun and make the moon look blood red. The power of the earthquake would move every mountain and ocean island from its former location. When God sends a great earthquake that shakes the entire underpinning of the earth, there will be great loss of life. Those trying to hide, but finding no spot untouched by the earthquake, will cry out for the mountains and rocks to fall on them. They know the earthquake is evidence of the wrath of the Lamb. But there is no report of conversions.

The Seventh Seal—Silence in Heaven (8:1)

After all the references to praise, singing, and shouting in heaven, why is there silence in heaven for half an hour?

After an interlude of two unrelated visions (the 144,000 redeemed from the tribes of Israel and a great multitude standing before God’s throne in heaven), we come to the seventh seal.

Thirty minutes is not a long time. But for a place of perpetual joy and praise, silence is stunning. The judgments associated with the opening of the seven seals are powerful. But they do not compare with what is ahead. The silent awe would seem to be a natural response to the judgments yet coming.

There is a definite progression from the judgments associated with the four horsemen of seals one through four. Conflict, war, famine, and death are all part of this life. The same events happen in the early part of the Tribulation, but with greater intensity and jeopardy to human life as time progresses.

The first mention of “the wrath of the Lamb” comes with the opening of the sixth seal. The suffering is so intense that the kings, princes, generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and free man cry out, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Revelation 6:16–17).

Describe what happens between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals.

Between the Sixth and Seventh Seals

Two events are recorded between the opening of the last two seals. We have looked at one event, the account of the 144,000 believers that arise out of the twelve tribes of Israel in Chapter 2, Lesson 1. The other scene John views before the opening of the seventh seal is the great multitude of redeemed people and angels praising God in heaven (Revelation 7:9–17).

As we began our study of the Tribulation, we observed that prophecy has a dark side. Looking at one judgment after another fails to inspire our hearts. Fortunately, John takes a break from the ominous story of future punishment of the wicked to visit a beautiful scene in heaven. The balance is refreshing.

The participants are a wonderful variety of blood-washed saints. “Before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’ ” (Revelation 7:9–10). The next verse describes the angels joining in the praise. Their praise seems more eloquent, possibly because they have been praising God since their creation: “Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”

The identity of the great multitude that could not be counted is something of a surprise. An elder tells John, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). It is no surprise that they worship with such joy. They took a stand for Christ in the Tribulation, paid the ultimate sacrifice with their lives, and now have joined the redeemed of all ages. These martyrs join the martyrs mentioned in the opening of the fifth seal (6:11).

The special love of Christ for these martyrs is touching: “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.... For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (7:16–17). What a refreshing picture in the midst of the awesome judgments!

9.2

John’s Vision of the Seven Trumpets of Judgment

Trumpets played an important part in the corporate lives of the Israelites. They were used to send the army into battle, to sound an alarm of approaching danger, to call God’s people to worship, to celebrate special holy days. The shofar was a trumpet made from the horn of an animal. Trumpets used in tabernacle and temple worship were made of hammered silver (Numbers 10:2). The trumpet sound was loud and could be heard at a great distance. The most famous trumpet of Scripture is the one that will be heard at the Rapture. “The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52). This trumpet will raise the dead!

The seven trumpet judgments may not seem as dramatic as some of the seal and bowl judgments. Some scholars have interpreted them as symbolic. But there is no reason at this point to move from a literal meaning to a symbolic interpretation.

Explain the significance of the seven trumpet judgments.

The Seven Trumpet Judgments

What kinds of prayers might be represented by the burning incense that rises to heaven?

When the seventh seal is broken, the scroll is unrolled and its contents revealed. Silence reigns in heaven for half an hour. The judgments that are about to happen on earth inspire a silent awe. When activity resumes, John sees seven angels given seven trumpets. Before the first angel blows his trumpet, John sees “another angel,” or eighth angel, standing before the altar, holding a golden censer (a fire pan for burning incense). The smoke of the burning incense is mingled with the prayers of the saints. These prayers probably relate to the purpose of the judgments.

Christ taught the disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). The prayers mingled with the burning incense in heaven must look forward to the day when sin and evil are abolished and God’s righteousness reigns supreme. Evil must be judged and punished before Christ’s kingdom can come on earth as it is in heaven.

The eighth angel fills the censer with fire from the altar and hurls it down on the earth. Loud thunder, lightning flashes, and an earthquake announce to the inhabitants of earth that further judgment is about to follow.

Trumpet 1: Judgment by Hail, Fire, and Blood (8:7)

The first trumpet sounds, and judgment falls on the earth. No human death or physical harm is recorded in this judgment. But the fire and hail burn one-third of the trees, and even the green grass. The food supply of humans and animals will be affected. Inhabitants are reminded that judgment is not yet complete. The significance of the blood is not explained, but we can recall that in the earlier demonstrations of God’s judgment, recorded in Exodus, blood is also mentioned in one of the plagues God sent on Egypt through Moses (7:14–24). The blood certainly underscores the supernatural nature of the judgment.

Trumpet 2: A Mountain in the Sea (8:8–9)

Whereas the first trumpet judgment falls on land, something like a huge flaming mountain is cast into the seas of earth, turning a third of the sea into blood, killing a third of the sea creatures, and destroying a third of the ships. Some have suggested that the violent death of sea creatures turns the water bloody.

Horton (1991) gives a possible explanation for the flaming mountain. “Some speculate that this might be an asteroid or some mass of rock and combustible gases from outer space that is ignited when it hits the earth’s atmosphere. However, even if it is a natural phenomenon, it is not accidental: God directs it and it falls into the sea at His timing, after the second trumpet sounds. Its mighty impact might shake the earth, and certainly all would know about it” (126).

Trumpet 3: Fall of a Blazing Star (8:10–11)

The third trumpet judgment may sound much like the second. But there are significant differences. A star blazing like a torch, rather than a mountain of molten rock, falls on fresh-water rivers and springs, rather than in the seas. This could be a meteor that becomes burning gas and liquid as it enters earth's atmosphere. God again uses the elements He has created to pour out the necessary judgment.

The star is named "Wormwood," after a plant with a strong bitter taste. A third of the fresh waters, above and below the ground, turn bitter and deadly. People who drink of the poisoned waters die. How many more forms can God's judgment take? The end is not yet.

Trumpet 4: One-third of Sun, Moon, and Stars Darkened (8:12)

The first four trumpet judgments come out of the heavens to afflict the earth and its inhabitants. Unnatural darkness in the heavenly bodies that usually shine brightly is cause for alarm. History records the fright some people have felt when their lives were briefly darkened by an eclipse of the sun. Such darkening of the sun and moon are of less concern when people know what is happening. But these judgments are far more than routine eclipses.

Darkness that lasts far beyond the minutes of an eclipse would significantly lower the temperature of the earth and greatly upset normal weather patterns. Jesus warned about the total darkness the wicked will experience as they weep and gnash their teeth (Matthew 8:12). The judgment of the fourth trumpet is just a foreshadowing of the greater eternal darkness prepared for the wicked.

Trumpet 5: Woe—the Opened Abyss (9:1–11)

The first four trumpet judgments share a similarity: each has signs that originate in the heavens. The last three also form a unit, sometimes called the three "woes."

Another star appears, but not the heavenly body seen in the first four trumpet judgments. This star is an angel, a messenger of God. "Fallen from the sky to the earth" means a rapid descent, not a fallen angel (Horton 1991, 131). God is about to use destroyers from the abyss, or hell, to punish evil inhabitants of earth. The angel opens the abyss, releasing smoke as from a gigantic furnace (9:2). Out of the smoke comes a multitude of devouring locusts. But these locusts are huge and demonic. Whereas ordinary locusts strip the fields of all vegetation, these are told to leave the vegetation alone. They are to devour humans, except those with the seal of God on their foreheads (9:4).

The locusts are like nothing the world has ever seen. They are the size of horses with faces like human beings. The flapping of their wings sound like the thunder of horses riding into battle. They wear iron breastplates and have stingers in their tails like scorpions. The people stung by the locust-scorpions are in such pain they want to die, but are unable to do so. This judgment lasts longer than any up to this time. "They had power to torment people for five months" (9:10). What a hideous sight are these part insect, part

animal, and part human demonic creatures! Their leader was the fallen “angel of the Abyss,” Abaddon or Apollyon (9:11).

Trumpet 6: Woe—Four Angels Loosed; One-third of Humans Killed (9:13–21)

A voice (probably the angel with a censer—Revelation 8:3–4) instructs the sixth angel to release four angels bound at the Euphrates River. Since there is no reason for holy angels to be bound, these four must be evil angels. Again, as with the fifth trumpet woe, God uses the demonic to punish those who have rejected God’s righteousness. Unlike the demonic locusts of the fifth trumpet, which could only torture but not kill, these evil angels are released to kill a third of the remaining inhabitants of earth.

If God knows no one will repent, why should He keep up the punishment?

The four unbound demonic angels are leaders of a huge army of two hundred million. The cavalry troops ride horses with heads like lions’ heads. From the mouths of the horses came fire, smoke, and sulfur—people were killed as they were “burned ‘by the fire,’ suffocated ‘by the smoke,’ and poisoned ‘by the sulfur’ ” (Horton 1991, 141). These three plagues kill a third of the population. The horses had tails like snakes; they destroyed with the power of their mouths and tails. With such terrible carnage, still no one left alive repents (9:20–21). The defiance of God is brazen and unashamed.

Trumpet 7: Rejoicing in Heaven; Woe—the bowls of wrath begin (11:15–19; 16:1)

What plague or epidemic is currently destroying many lives around the world?

Once again, it is time for relief. After judgment upon judgment, we must see Jesus as He is to believers. Though a severe judge of the wicked, Jesus is the Lord, the Christ, the Savior, the Sacrifice, the loving High Priest, but only to those in heaven. No wonder the loud voices in heaven shout praise, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (11:15). The composer George Frederick Handel added, “Hallelujah, Hallelujah.” The twenty-four elders lift up their praise, “The time has come ... for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying

those who destroy the earth” (11:18). Satan’s time is truly short. The bowls of wrath are about to begin.

Would some of those that John saw killed in the various judgments have turned to Christ if they had not been killed?

This present world has seen earthquakes, but none like those that will shake the earth during the Tribulation. We have had plagues like the Black Death, or bubonic plague in Europe in the fourteenth century, or worldwide AIDS/HIV in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. But these will all pale in comparison with the devastations and disasters taking place in the Tribulation.

In spite of the terrible judgments that are taking place during the Tribulation, people harden their hearts and refuse to repent (9:20–21; 16:8–11). Those who continue to reject Christ face judgment. Sadly, they have eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear. God is patient, and faithful to forgive the repentant heart. He gives opportunity after opportunity. But ultimately, judgment must come to those who stubbornly reject Christ.

9.3

John’s Vision of the Seven Bowls of Judgment

The judgments continue to increase in intensity as the Tribulation period progresses. Jesus referred to the Tribulation, and redemption drawing near in Luke chapter 21:

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:25–28)

No one could rejoice over the suffering and unparalleled judgments that are taking place. Still, as the sequence of judgments comes to a conclusion, we know our redemption, and the redemption of all creation, is soon to happen.

The judgments announced by the sounding of trumpets often mention “a third” of the earth affected or a third of the population killed. Some are inclined to count the “thirds” and reason that when three-thirds are killed, there will be no more human life on the planet. But that is a misreading of the meaning. Each judgment applies only to the

remaining elements or persons after the previous judgments. So there will still be plenty of inhabitants left on earth to follow Antichrist into battle against Christ. But all those still living on earth will have suffered greatly, even if they may still be alive at the end of the Tribulation.

What is meant by the angel's announcement, "Fallen is Babylon the Great" (Revelation 14:8)?

The sixth trumpet judgment concludes the ninth chapter of Revelation. Just as the sixth seal judgment is followed by an interlude before the next seal is broken (Revelation 7), a similar interlude appears between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments. Not until Revelation 16:1–21 do we actually read the pouring out of the bowls of judgment on the earth. The interlude includes several matters we have already studied: the two witnesses, the woman (Israel) giving birth to a male child (Jesus), the beast rising out of the sea (Antichrist), another beast rising out of the earth (the false prophet), and the mark of the beast (Chapters 12 and 13). The mention of Babylon the Great is also included in the interlude.

Summarize the events on earth as the bowl judgments are poured out

The Bowl Judgments and the Three Cycles of God's Wrath

Another group of seven angels are told by a great voice, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth" (Revelation 16:1). The first angel goes to work immediately. Some Bible students have suggested that the bowl judgments are simply repeats of the trumpet judgments, and it is true that the first four judgments in each cycle have similarities. The first judgments (in both sets) deal with the earth, the second with the sea, the third with rivers and springs, and the fourth with the sun. But there are sufficient differences to indicate two completely separate sets of judgment. For example, the trumpet judgments affect only one-third of the earth; the bowl judgments impact the entire earth. "There is really no problem of repetition of judgments.... What the Scripture is revealing is that these judgments as time progresses become increasingly worse and occurring in rapid chronological order. The seven bowls apparently occur one after the other in rapid sequence and immediately introduce the situation of the second coming of

Christ. In Revelation 16 a series of judgments beyond anything ever mentioned before is revealed” (Walvoord 1999, 596–7). The bowl judgments are plagues much, much worse than those that were poured out on Egypt before Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave (Exodus 7–11).

Describe the response of heaven and earth’s inhabitants to the bowl judgments.

First Bowl: Painful Sores

The mark of the beast now identifies those on whom the judgment of painful sores falls. The only persons who escape this judgment are those who have refused the mark of the beast and have refused to worship Antichrist. Many who have taken such a stand have already been martyred. These sores are not temporary sores that can be healed with ointment. They are abscessed, malignant boils that cannot be cured.

Second Bowl: Sea Turned to Blood

Rather than a flaming mountain falling into the sea (Trumpet Judgment 2), another bowl of judgment is poured out. Some might perceived the trumpet judgment as a terrible natural tragedy, but there is no natural element to this plague: all the sea water turns to blood. The stench of the sea is much worse than in the trumpet judgment; it is “like that of a dead man” (16:3).

Third Bowl: Fresh Waters Become Blood

Bible scholars disagree as to whether the waters become real blood or just appear to be bloody. In either case, no one would want to drink what usually was fresh water. The mention of blood, however, draws attention to this judgment as punishment for the wicked followers of Antichrist shedding the blood of God’s people. An angel says, “You [God] are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve” (16:5–6). Yet we must remember that God does not reciprocate out of anger or desire for vengeance. His attribute of justice demands that evil be judged. And judgment in like kind is given here. They have murdered the saints, overwhelmingly shed their blood, and now blood is given to these for their thirst.

Fourth Bowl: Heat of the Sun Intensifies

Whereas the fourth trumpet judgment affects the sun, moon, and stars, the fourth angel pours out his bowl on the sun, producing intense heat that scorches and burns humans. Even now the sun experiences natural eruptions and great solar storms that

affect weather on earth. This judgment is more than severe sunburn. It is “with fire” (16:8). If there are any polar ice caps left on the earth at this time, their melting could cause another kind of devastation as the level of the oceans rises dramatically.

The response of those suffering the intense pain and agony is predictable. They have so hardened their hearts toward God that they blaspheme His holy name (16:9). These are not just agnostics who do not know whether or not God exists. They know He exists, and they curse God and revile Him.

Fifth Bowl: Antichrist’s Kingdom Plunged into Darkness

Where is the throne or headquarters of the Antichrist?

While the fifth trumpet judgment involves horse-size locusts released from the abyss (hell), this judgment empties the bowl on the throne of the beast (Antichrist). The heavenly lights shining on earth are turned out. Darkness descends.

The reaction of the inhabitants suddenly plunged into darkness seems unusual. Why would men gnaw their tongues in agony because of darkness? Because each judgment is added to previous judgments, those suffering from earlier boils and bloody water would be unable to find even the slightest relief from their agonies. Gnawing their tongues reminds us of the punishment of the wicked who will be thrown “into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42). But “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (v. 43).

Sixth Bowl: Getting Ready for Armageddon

What is the meaning of “Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed” (Revelation 16:15)?

The Euphrates River is mentioned here, as it was in the sixth trumpet judgment, but in quite a different way. As the angel pours out the sixth bowl, the Euphrates River dries up. There is a symbolic purpose for this end-time event. It prepares the way for the kings from the east to descend on Palestine where the battle of Armageddon will take place to end the Tribulation. Demonic spirits, described as frogs, persuade not only the kings from the east but also the kings of the whole world to assemble for the battle.

Seventh Bowl: Finale

Like the thunderous conclusion of a great symphony, the seventh bowl sums up all that preceded. Lightning, thunder, and loud voices introduce each of the three sets of judgments (Revelation 4:5, 8:5, and 11:19). And the conclusion of the twenty-one judgments is signaled by flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. The judgments consist of two unparalleled events: (1) an earthquake that causes the cities of the world to collapse, and (2) a storm of one hundred pound hailstones. Not only does the earthquake destroy cities, but the very landscape is greatly altered— islands and mountains suddenly disappear. Heaven rejoices even before the seventh bowl judgment begins. The angels and saints around the throne know that the long line of terrible judgments has finally come to the end. Thus, “Out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!” (16:17). The voice is that of God or Christ, not just an angel.

The dead victims of the Tribulation have been judged, but the remaining population curses God for the awesome plagues He has sent (16:21). No hearts are going to be changed. Antichrist and his satanic forces are about to meet the full wrath of the Lamb.

Satan has had his day. His attempts to persuade most of the inhabitants to give their allegiance to Antichrist, Satan’s tool, have been successful. But the unbelievable sequence of judgments has eliminated many of the enemy’s followers. After a brief battle, it will be judgment time for Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet.

10

Armageddon: Climax of the Tribulation

The twenty-one judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls are past history at this point in the record of Revelation (Revelation 16). But there is not even a single change of heart. There has been plenty of invitation to turn from Satan-inspired Antichrist and give full allegiance to Christ. Yet a commitment to evil is hard to break. One must determine to make the change, and then turn to God for help in forsaking evil and embracing righteousness. In our present age, the Holy Spirit helps those who sincerely seek His help. Because Scripture records that no one repented after several of the judgments strongly suggests that repentance was possible. Yet the desire to repent no longer stirred within the rebellious. Anger and blasphemy against God were no doubt prompted by Satan, with the people's consent.

Many of the wicked were destroyed in the sequence of judgments just studied. But many more remained rebellious against God and His righteous rule. There comes a time for every person, even today, when God's message is "Repent or be eternally lost." The chance for the inhabitants of earth to repent passed with the completion of the seventh bowl judgment. After that it was time to remove evil from the face of the earth. God is patient, but He also knows when patience no longer will bring the needed change of heart.

The worldwide scope of the war or campaign of Armageddon, often called the Battle of Armageddon, is the final judgment that wipes evil from the face of the earth for 1,000 years. Then follows a brief time of testing for those born during the Millennium. After that the earth will be eternally free from any manifestation of evil.

Lesson 10.1 The Ultimate Conflict Between God and Satan

Objectives

- 10.1.1 Indicate the significance of the site for the Battle of Armageddon.*
- 10.1.2 Summarize the battle plans of the forces of Antichrist.*
- 10.1.3 Analyze the Battle of Armageddon in relation to Ezekiel's Invasion by Gog.*

Lesson 10.2 Preparation for the Millennium

Objectives

- 10.2.1 Describe the appearance of Jesus as He confronts the armies of the world.*
- 10.2.2 Point out the judgment on Satan's forces in relation to a peaceful Millennium.*
- 10.2.3 Indicate the honor that comes to those martyred for Christ in the Tribulation.*

10.1	The Ultimate Conflict Between God and Satan
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The title “Battle of Armageddon” suggests that the event is an isolated and brief conflict that spontaneously erupts and lasts for a day. At first glance, Revelation 16:14 seems to support that view, calling Armageddon “the battle on the great day of God Almighty.” However, “the Greek *polemos*, translated “battle” in Revelation 16:14, signifies a war or campaign, while *machē* signifies a battle, and sometimes even single combat.... The use of the word *polemos* (campaign) ... would signify that the events that culminate in the gathering at Armageddon at the second advent are viewed by God as one connected campaign” (Pentecost 1964, 340). As we study the events leading up to the “great day of God Almighty,” we will at times use the common terminology “the Battle of Armageddon.” Just remember, however, that it is actually a campaign or a war, not just a single conflict.

Indicate the significance of the site for the Battle of Armageddon.

Armageddon, Present-day Israel, and Palestine

How much of Palestine is the involved in Armageddon?

Armageddon is “the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *Har Megiddon*, ‘the Mountain of Megiddo.’ Megiddo was one of the Canaanite cities in north-central Palestine.... It guarded the pass used by ancient caravans and armies as they moved from the central valley of Esdraelon to the coastal plain of Sharon on their way to Egypt” (Horton 1991, 234). The Plain of Esdraelon (or great valley) lies across Central Palestine from the Jordan to the Mediterranean, approximately nine miles from east to west and fourteen miles from north to south. The Bible records a number of battles fought there by Israel, but there have also been other great battles involving major world powers that occurred on this same location.

The conflict reaches far beyond this valley. The “Valley of Jehoshaphat,” an area east of Jerusalem, is mentioned in Joel 3:2, 12. The city of Jerusalem will also be involved in the conflict (Zechariah 12:2–11; 14:2). In dramatic imagery, Revelation 14:20 describes blood from dying soldiers and horses “rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia,” or 180 miles. The Armageddon conflict will apparently cover practically

the entire length of Palestine. The world has never seen such carnage, even in the most vicious of wars. From where do all the warriors come for this astronomical battle?

What part do evil spirits play in Satan's plan to gather all the nations of the world to fight against God?

God is in full control of what happens on earth. Even though Satan uses his evil devices to bring together a huge army to fight against God, he will not succeed. God knows too that Satan's time is short (Revelation 12:12). Satan's success in bringing together the armies of the nations of the world in a relatively small area of Palestine is designed by God to make this judgment of Satan final. The drying up of the Euphrates River in the sixth bowl judgment provides easy access for the kings of the east, and their armies, as they come to Palestine for the final showdown.

This is how Satan does his evil work. "Three evil spirits that looked like frogs ... came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty" (Revelation 16:13–14).

The Old Testament prophet Joel affirms it is actually God who brings the armies of the world together. God says, "I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat (meaning, *the Lord judges*). There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land" (Joel 3:2). Later in the same chapter, Joel describes the mass of armies gathered to fight against God: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision" (3:14). Though the phrase "valley of decision," used in contemporary times could mistakenly be understood as a place or point of decision to accept Christ as Savior, it really means that God at Armageddon "renders His decision and pronounces judgment because wickedness is so great" (Horton 1996, 92).

Summarize the battle plans of the forces of Antichrist.

Antichrist's Strategy for Defeating God and His Chosen People

What are Antichrist's goals in challenging God at the end of the Tribulation?

Satan has a two-fold purpose in gathering the nations of the world, under the command of Antichrist: (1) to fight and defeat God, and (2) to destroy Jerusalem, the holy city of God's chosen nation Israel. Zechariah 14:2 describes the attack against Jerusalem: "I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city." Again, God is drawing Satan, Antichrist, and the kings and armies of the nations, so He can judge and destroy those that have persecuted His people, Israel. "I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger" (Zephaniah 3:8). It is most likely that many of the warnings by Jesus in Matthew 24 concern this context of the judgment. Although Antichrist made a covenant with the Jews at the beginning of the Tribulation, that covenant was renounced in the middle of the seven years. The attitude toward Jews then turns violent.

The seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments make Satan desperate. He has always looked for opportunities to deflect God's benevolent care for His children. When God's judgment fell on "the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness" (Revelation 16:10), Satan no doubt knew He had to confront his major opponent, Christ the Messiah. John records, "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army" (Revelation 19:19). The full magnificence of Christ's return to earth to confront the armies of the Antichrist will be covered in the next lesson.

Analyze the Battle of Armageddon in relation to Ezekiel's Invasion by Gog.

The Contrast between the Battle of Armageddon and the Invasion of Gog

Some Bible students have identified Ezekiel's account of Israel being invaded from the north under the leadership of **Gog** (Ezekiel 38–39) as another perspective on Armageddon. But there are too many differences to support such a claim. Some of the more prominent differences include:

If Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog invading Israel is not the same as Armageddon, what is its meaning?

Gog invades from the north, while at Armageddon the armies come from all directions. Gog invades to plunder Israel, but the nations at Armageddon seek to destroy the faithful.

Gog leads the northern invasion while Antichrist leads God's opposition at Armageddon.

Gog's specific allies are mentioned, while all the nations of the world are engaged at Armageddon.

Armageddon is followed immediately by the destruction of the earth as we know it, while life goes on after the northern invasion.

Armageddon is focused around Jerusalem, while the northern invasion never reaches Jerusalem.

It would seem likely that the invasion of Israel predicted in Ezekiel 38 and 39 does have a part to play in end-time prophecy, in that no event in past history satisfies the biblical prediction. This suggests to many that the event must still be in the future. In the last half of the twentieth century, when Russia was a superpower on the world scene, many were predicting that Russia would be the lead nation in the invasion of Israel from the north. Russia, however, is not mentioned in the Bible, and some of the biblical names applied to Russia lack solid definitions. Believers, though, need not be troubled about a perfect identification. The challenge is to learn from all that we do have clearly expressed in Scripture. If the invasion of Israel takes place in the middle of the Tribulation, believers will be in heaven at that time with the Bridegroom, Christ Jesus.

When will the invasion of Israel by Gog and his allies take place?

Gog and Magog are also mentioned in Revelation 20:8. "Although the names are borrowed from Ezekiel 38 and 39, the circumstances described in Revelation are different from those described in Ezekiel. It seems logical therefore that those people described in Revelation are simply a Gog and Magog type of people" (Horton 1996, 215–216).

What will be the purpose of God's supernatural deliverance of Israel from the northern invasion led by Gog?

Some details in Ezekiel help us understand when this invasion might take place. Israel is described as living in "safety" (38:8, 14), as "a peaceful and unsuspecting people" (38:11), in villages "without walls" (38:11). That certainly is not the situation in Israel today. But when Antichrist makes a covenant with the Jews, for seven years, at the beginning of the Tribulation, peace could well prevail. In fact, most Bible students understand the Bible to indicate that the first 3½ years will be quite peaceful. But when the covenant is broken in the middle of the Tribulation, world attitudes toward Israel change dramatically. It could likely be at such a time, just before the breaking of the covenant, that the northern invasion takes place.

One fact about the invasion can easily be overlooked. There is no mention of any Israeli army opposing the invading army. Instead, God acts supernaturally in behalf of His people. First, there is a great earthquake (Ezekiel 38:19) affecting fish, birds, and animals. Then God causes the invading soldiers to fight among themselves (38:21). This is followed by a plague, torrential rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur (38:22). God concludes, "So I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD" (38:23). The nations, especially the invading nations, will see God's hand working against them. Imagine what the Israelis will feel when they realize that God has worked miraculously in their behalf.

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2

**Preparation for the
Millennium**

After the last bowl judgment, a voice from the throne in heaven declared, "It is done" (Revelation 16:17). This marks a point of completion. But there is still some cleanup that must be done before Christ's kingdom comes on earth as it now is in heaven. Armageddon deals with Satan and his evil followers so that Christ can usher in 1,000 years of righteousness and peace on earth.

Describe the appearance of Jesus as He confronts the armies of the world.

The Majestic Stance of Jesus Against the Armies of Antichrist

Describing Christ's return to earth to confront Antichrist and the gathered nations of the world is like trying to capture the sublime with the use of the most ordinary terms known to man. This is John's attempt as the Holy Scriptures has it recorded:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11–16).

What is the significance of Christ on a white horse, the army of saints that is following on white horses, and their clothing of white linen?

This is the scene toward which all the covenants and promises of Scripture point. God's plan from the beginning to restore what Satan polluted was effectively accomplished at Calvary. It is fully achieved when evil is removed from the face of the earth, and every living being on earth recognizes Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Christ is a majestic figure on a magnificent white horse. When Roman generals returned home from a victorious war, they often rode a white horse in a procession, followed by prisoners who had been taken captive. Christ returns to earth, not to take prisoners, but to destroy all wickedness.

The symbolism of Christ's description is powerful. Eyes like blazing fire capture the Righteous One's wrath toward evil in all its forms and manifestations. The many crowns on His head confirm that He is King over all kings. The name written on him "that no one knows but he himself" may be based on attributes of His deity and office. Dressed in a robe dipped in blood may at first seem to detract from the majesty of the scene. But to the

“blood-bought” (Acts 20:28) believers, a robe dipped in His blood shed at Calvary is the most important part of the picture.

The armies of heaven following Christ certainly add awe and a presence of might to the scene. The host accompanying Him on white horses are a picture of the victorious status of this heavenly army. They are dressed in “fine linen, white and clean,” almost the same words used to describe the redeemed at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7). The scene is truly white and bright!

Having described the scene, it is now time for action. There is no mention of weapons in the hands of the saints following Christ. There is no need for them. Only one weapon is needed to destroy the gathered nations. A sharp sword comes out of His mouth to strike down the nations. Whether literal or symbolic, it makes no difference. His word is sharper than any double-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Ruling the nations “with an iron scepter” gives the picture of a Shepherd going before and destroying the enemies of the sheep. Comparing “the fury of the wrath of God Almighty” to treading a winepress makes even clearer the fierceness of this King of kings and Lord of lords. This aspect of God is the other side of a patient, compassionate, and loving Christ who wants every last sinner to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). But this gentle Jesus hates sin and evil with a fury that knows no bounds. A day of judgment eventually comes to those who persist in their rebellion against Christ (3:10). The winepress is a common biblical image for the wrath of God. But instead of juice coming out as the grapes are trampled, it is blood that flows until it comes up to the horses’ bridles (Revelation 14:20).

The scene gets even worse. An angel calls out to the birds, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great” (Revelation 19:17–18). “The birds gorged themselves on their flesh” (19:21). Such is the end of the wicked warriors at Armageddon.

Point out the judgment on Satan’s forces in relation to a peaceful Millennium.

The Binding of Satan

What happens to Satan at the same time Antichrist and the false prophet are cast into the fiery lake burning with sulfur?

Armageddon is over. The humans who have devoted themselves to following Satan and Antichrist have met their judgment day. Only one verse is given to reporting the end of

Antichrist and the false prophet: “The beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (Revelation 19:20).

The fiery lake (lake of fire, KJV) is the final abode of the wicked. But various persons and spirit beings are sent there permanently, at different times. Antichrist and the false prophet are thrown into the fiery lake as their final punishment. Satan, however, is bound and thrown into the Abyss, a place from which he is allowed to leave for a short time after the Millennium. The wicked dead, who are resurrected at the end of the Millennium to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment, are then thrown into the fiery lake as their permanent place of punishment.

Various words are used in the New Testament for the temporary and permanent place of the wicked. Hell, usually translated as Sheol in the Old Testament and as Hades, Gehenna or Tartarus in the New Testament, is the intermediate or temporary state to which the unsaved go now when they die. The fiery lake (lake of fire), the permanent place of punishment, is also referred to as Gehenna, named after a narrow ravine near Jerusalem where apostate Jews once sacrificed their children to Molech. The narrow valley later became a city dump, where a burning fire never went out.

Satan’s confinement in the Abyss as his temporary punishment means he does not have any evil influence on nations or individuals for 1,000 years. What a time that will be when Satan is bound and his evil deception removed.

Indicate the honor that comes to those martyred for Christ in the Tribulation.

Honor of the Tribulation Martyrs/Saints

The Millennium—1,000 years of peace, safety, righteousness, and justice—will begin as soon as Christ prevails at Armageddon and Satan is bound in the Abyss. Yet God is ever mindful of those who suffer and are martyred for Christ when they refuse to take the mark of the beast or give allegiance to Christ’s enemy. John reports, “I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

Our faith is built on the resurrection of Jesus the third day after His crucifixion. We have studied the resurrection of “the dead in Christ” at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

During the Tribulation the two witnesses are resurrected after lying in the streets of Jerusalem for 3½ days (Revelation 11:11). Now, in Revelation 20:4 we read of the Tribulation martyrs who “came to life and reigned with Christ” in the Millennium just beginning.

Because we live in a world in which the forces of evil are all around us, we daily face trials, temptations, testing, and suffering. Maybe they are not as severe as times will be in the Tribulation. But like the martyrs who gave their lives because of their faith in Christ, we too can receive strength from the Holy Spirit to face life’s daily challenges. There is a crown awaiting those who remain faithful (1 Peter 5:4). Determine to serve God with all your heart, mind, and body today, tomorrow, and each day until Jesus comes to take His followers to be with Him forever.

Unit 4

The Millennium and the Eternal Kingdom

“Joy to the World” is one of the most-loved carols sung at Christmas time. Yet if you look closely, you cannot find any mention of the birth of Christ. Written in 1719 by the great hymn writer Isaac Watts, the carol was inspired by Psalm 98. The psalm begins “Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things” (98:1). “All the earth” is encouraged to “shout for joy” and “burst into jubilant song” (98:4). Harp, trumpets, and the ram’s horn are to be used. The sea, the rivers, the mountains are called to sing

together for joy (98:5–8). Why? Not only because a Savior is born, but because the LORD “comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity” (98:9). Thought of the newborn Christ child no doubt made Watts consider the future time when that child would return to earth as King of kings and Lord of Lords.

This is not a reference to the judgments of the Tribulation, but rather to the righteous reign of Christ, who will dispense justice and rule benevolently in the Millennium and the Eternal Kingdom. The words are beautiful!

Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive her King;
Let ev’ry heart prepare Him room, And heav’n and nature sing.
No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground;

[That happens only in the Millennium, as earth returns to its Garden of Eden state.]

He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love.

The next time you sing “Joy to the World,” think of the future fulfillment of the purpose for which Jesus came as a baby born in Bethlehem. Our thoughts at Christmas should be focused in two directions—back to the great gift God gave in sending His Son, and forward to the time when we will live forever under His perfect reign. In this unit of study, we look at Christ’s role in the Millennium and the Eternal Kingdom.

Chapter 11 The History of Various Millennial Views

Lessons

- C11.1 Amillennialism
- C11.2 Postmillennialism
- C11.3 The Role of Dispensationalism
- C11.4 Commitment to Premillennialism

Chapter 12 The Millennial Kingdom

Lessons

- C12.1 The Central Figure in the Millennium
- C12.2 The Government in the Millennium
- C12.3 Activities of the Saints in the Millennium

Chapter 13 The Final States of the Righteous and the Wicked

Lessons

- C13.1 The New Heaven and the New Earth
- C13.2 The Final State of the Wicked

11

The History of Various Millennial Views

No other topic of end-time prophecy has raised more controversy than the Millennium. For some, the “1,000-year period” is nothing more than a spiritual state the believer enjoys some time after salvation. In this case, the thousand years are seen as symbolic, not literal. Others have expressed the belief that they were already living in the best of all possible worlds, and things are getting better all the time. Some think Israel has had its chance, but failed the test and now will have no part in the Millennium, even though the Bible mentions Israel in end-time events. They believe the church is now heir to all the promises given to Israel.

Different views of the Millennium have prevailed at different times in the history of the church. When society has enjoyed even a short time of peace and prosperity, a majority have felt they were living in the Millennium. But when wars and worldwide calamity come on the scene, their thinking shifts to the Tribulation scenes in the Bible, and to the peace and calm of a Millennium beyond. Of course, each shift of belief requires a revised interpretation of prophecy. When biblical prophecy appears to describe something that is actually going to happen in the future, it should be taken as such unless something in the passage clearly indicates another meaning.

The greatest variation in interpreting Bible prophecy comes when students and scholars see symbolism in the biblical accounts of the end-time and begin to describe what they think the symbolism represents. This approach opens up great opportunity for speculation as to what the biblical description actually means. We will look at three of the major approaches to explaining Bible prophecy, and at the same time attempt to point out the strengths and weaknesses of each view.

Lesson 11.1 Amillennialism

Objectives

- 11.1.1 *Indicate the scriptural basis for amillennialism.*
- 11.1.2 *Establish the view of amillennialism toward a restoration of Israel.*
- 11.1.3 *Explain how the amillennial view affects one's attitude toward society.*

Lesson 11.2 Postmillennialism

Objectives

- 11.2.1 *Explain postmillennialism's loss of influence in the twentieth century.*
- 11.2.2 *Identify new versions of postmillennialism in recent years.*

Lesson 11.3 The Role of Dispensationalism

Objectives

- 11.3.1 *Identify the founder and popularizer of dispensationalism.*
- 11.3.2 *Indicate the effect of dispensationalism on premillennialism.*

11.3.3 *Describe some deficiencies of strict dispensationalism.*

Lesson 11.4 Commitment to Premillennialism

Objectives

11.4.1 *Summarize the premillennial position on literal interpretation of prophecy and the restoration of Israel.*

11.4.2 *Contrast premillennialism with several spiritualizing views.*

11.4.3 *Relate the importance of Premillennialism to one's faith.*

11.1

Amillennialism

Some premillennialists think that anyone who does not believe in a literal millennium of 1,000 years cannot possibly be a true Christian. However, we should recognize that many who hold the amillennial view are sincere believers who have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

Though various millennial views may be held, what does the Bible say we must believe in order to be saved?

When the Philippian jailer asked what he had to do to be saved, Paul replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:29). There was no mention of his understanding of the Millennium or of his interpretation of Scripture. That does not mean our beliefs in such matters are not important. Each of us must ask if our interpretation of end-time prophecy draws us closer to the Lord and makes us more effective witnesses, or if it accommodates personal preferences rather than God's plan for His children. We dare not be dogmatic or contentious in our disagreement over what will happen in the future. But each person should "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

Indicate the scriptural basis for amillennialism.

Amillennial View of Bible References

What does the binding and casting of Satan into the Abyss mean to amillennialists?

Amillennialists believe that Revelation 20:1–6 describes events in the entire history of the Church Age. Some amillennialists further see the book of Revelation as divided into seven parallel sections, with each section describing the world from the time of Jesus' coming to earth to die for our sins to the time of His second coming. We need not list these seven sections here. We need only to recognize that the amillennialist approach spiritualizes the details of Revelation rather than accepts the literal statements of the book. In other words they view prophetic events described in Scripture more often as allegory giving us spiritual lessons upon which to base our understanding and actions.

How do amillennialists identify those sitting on thrones and judging, as recorded in Revelation 20:4?

By assuming that Revelation 20:1–3 describes the current Church Age, the binding of Satan and casting him into the Abyss for 1,000 years is interpreted as already having happened. Satan was defeated, and therefore bound, when Christ died on the Cross. Thus, the number “1,000” is not to be interpreted literally. One proponent of amillennialism explains it this way: “Since the number ten signifies completeness, and since a thousand is ten to the third power, we may think of the expression ‘a thousand years’ as standing for a complete period, a very long period of indeterminate length” (Hoekema 1977, 161). Departure from the literal meaning of 1,000 can make it mean almost anything. And for amillennialists, Satan's being bound does not mean that he can do no harm on earth, only that he cannot deceive the nations (Revelation 20:3).

Some amillennialists see Revelation 20:4–6 as taking place in heaven right now. Believers who have died, especially those martyred, are supposedly reigning with Christ during the Church Age. They reign with Christ between their death and Christ's Second Coming. Amillennialists also suggest the possibility that the peaceful descriptions of the thousand years could well be applied to “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). Amillennialists do not see a distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming with

seven years between the two. For them, Christ's return is a single event. At that time there will be a general judgment of both the wicked and the righteous. After that, Jesus will establish His eternal kingdom, with no millennium in between.

In reviewing the amillennial position on Bible prophecy, the frequent suggestion of "another explanation" than the literal statement of Scripture demonstrates the weakness of the position. One wonders if there might also be other "spiritualized" possibilities just as satisfactory as the one offered. To go to the extreme of picking and choosing possible spiritual meanings is no improvement over taking God's Word literally.

Establish the view of amillennialism toward a restoration of Israel.

Amillennialist's View of Israel's Role during the End-time

Amillennialists spend more time attacking what they call the extremes of premillennialists than they do describing their own position. This is nowhere more evident than in their teaching on the place of Israel in the end-time.

How do amillennialists explain the Bible predictions of a restored national Israel?

Amillennialists reject the idea of a restored national Israel or that Israel can be in any way, now or in the future, God's chosen people. For them, the establishment of the nation of Israel in Palestine (1948) has no meaning or significance for end-time prophecy. In his book *Prophecy and the church*, amillennialist Oswald Allis supported the belief that Israel no longer had a role in God's end-time plan. Allis charged that dispensational premillennialists were extreme in their literal reading of Bible prophecy. Therefore, the amillennial position is the correct view. Israel's promises are now the church's (Horton 1996, 172). Amillennialists point to New Testament references to the new covenant, supposedly proving the church is now fulfilling all the Old Testament promises to Israel.

Nowhere in Scripture is such a position supported. Assurance that God has not forsaken His people, Israel, though they have miserably failed Him, is found in both the Old and New Testaments. Jeremiah 31:31–34 specifically states that a new covenant will be made with Israel and Judah; verses 35–37 describe additional assurances for the

nation of Israel. The statement in Jeremiah 31:31–34 is recalled by the writer of Hebrews (8:8–10).

In Romans 11, Paul details the fact that Israel has a future in God’s plan. Identifying himself as “the apostle to the Gentiles” (11:13), Paul mentions several reasons why God is not finished with Israel.

1. Israel as the root supports the Gentile branches (11:19);
2. The natural branches cut off from the tree will more naturally be grafted back into the original tree (11:24);
3. Israel has experienced a falling away until “the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (11:25–26);
4. “As far as election is concerned, [Israel is] ... loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (11:28–29).

Only by departing from the literal statement and meaning of Scripture can Israel be denied a role in God’s end-time plan.

Explain how the amillennial view affects one’s attitude toward society.

Amillennialist’s View of End-time Society

Amillennialists do agree with premillennialists on one important matter. The situation on earth will continue to get worse. On this significant point, postmillennialism stands apart, as we will see in the next lesson.

What is the one important point on which amillennialists and premillennialists agree?

Amillennialism was not known to believers in the early church. For the first three centuries of church history, premillennialism was unchallenged. But that changed when Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire early in the fourth century A.D. Christians suddenly were freed from oppression and persecution. Instead of seeing themselves in great tribulation, looking forward to the millennium of peace, they began to feel that life on earth was not so bad.

In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Augustine became the leading theologian/philosopher of the Roman Catholic Church. His amillennial perspective on biblical eschatology became the established doctrine of the church. His spiritualizing of the prophetic portions of Scripture have so prevailed over the intervening centuries that amillennialism is the official stance of the Roman Catholic Church today.

While postmillennialism has faded to some degree on the current Bible eschatology scene, amillennialism is the primary competitor with premillennialism in the Christian religious world today. Whereas premillennialism exists mainly in the Evangelical-Pentecostal segment of Christian churches worldwide, amillennialism appeals to a wide variety of religious persuasion—liberal and moderate Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. Pentecost (1964) describes some of the appeal for these groups. Amillennialism “presents a simple eschatological system, with only one resurrection, one judgment, and very little in a prophetic program for the future,” and “It appeals to many as a ‘spiritual’ interpretation of Scripture rather than a literal interpretation, which is referred to as a ‘carnal concept’ of the millennium” (388). Although this view tends to look down on those who believe in a literal interpretation of biblical prophecy, premillennialists are persuaded it is better to take God at His literal word, rather than spiritualize it according to human explanation.

11.2

Postmillennialism

The terms amillennial, postmillennial, and premillennial can be confusing. However, you can help keep the words straight by relating them to Christ’s return to earth. Amillennialists believe there will not be a millennium, so relation to Christ’s return is not an issue. Postmillennialists believe that Christ returns to earth after the millennium, in which we supposedly live now. Premillennialists believe that Christ returns to earth just before He sets up the Millennial Kingdom. “A-” means no Millennium. “Post-” is after the Millennium. “Pre-” is before the Millennium. But there are many more details to these beliefs than just the event from which they take their names.

To what do postmillennialists and amillennialists attribute the premillennial commitment to a literal interpretation of Bible prophecy?

Postmillennialists reject the idea that end-time prophecy will unfold literally as described in Scripture. This is also the position of the amillennialists. Both groups attack

premillennialists for their commitment to a literal interpretation, asserting that the symbolism of great literature is the major key to understanding it, and the prophetic passages of the Scripture lend themselves reasonable to this approach more often than not.

One more kindly postmillennialist addresses the issue this way: “Premillennialists place strong emphasis on literal interpretation and pride themselves on taking Scripture just as it is written. Post- and amillennialists on the other hand, mindful that much of both the Old and New Testaments is unquestionably given in figurative or symbolical language, have no objection on principle to figurative interpretation and readily accept that if the evidence indicates it is preferable” (Boettner 1977, 134). The variety of explanations that come from such an approach demonstrates the weakness of spiritualizing the details of God’s Word.

Explain postmillennialism’s loss of influence in the twentieth century.

The Postmillennial “Golden Age”

What evidence do postmillennialists give that the world is getting better?

Postmillennialists believe that a golden age, or millennium, is gradually coming to reality. This is quite the opposite from the premillennialist belief in a sudden judgment and destruction of evil at the end of the Tribulation. Though there may be temporary setbacks, postmillennialists claim that overall there is progress toward a better life. Such things as the status of women, the generosity of advanced nations helping the oppressed and suffering of the world, improvements in education and social conditions, and technology that improves human life all move the world toward the perfect place to which Christ will return and set up His eternal kingdom.

Who is considered the father of the teaching of a coming golden age at the end of the Church Age?

Postmillennialists do not claim that every single person on earth will at some future time be a Christian. Nor will sin be completely abolished. Instead, “evil in all its many forms eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a truly Christianized world” (Boettner 1977, 118). The biblical reference to 1,000 years is not literal, but only a symbol for as long as it takes to Christianize the world. Postmillennialists say those who deny the possibility of a Christianized world in this present Church Age do not understand the power of the gospel. Some have even suggested that premillennialists do not have the incentive to evangelize the world because they have no hope of the world becoming a place of peace and righteousness. Yet, premillennialists, Pentecostals being among the strongest groups, are going into all the world with the gospel more effectively than any other Christian groups. A burden for lost souls is more powerful than the hope of a perfect world.

Postmillennialism as a theory of the end-time goes back to Daniel Whitby (1638–1726). His departure from the prevailing amillennial view at the time was encouraged by a newly-found optimism growing out of **humanism**, scientific discoveries, and intellectual freedom. Independent thinkers viewed the new discoveries and advances as promising a bright future for all humankind. When Whitby began preaching about a coming golden age for the church, the new teaching caught the attention of all levels of society. However, while the Bible speaks of a future time when there will be peace and safety, this time is not in our present Church Age.

Identify new versions of postmillennialism in recent years.

The Decline of Postmillennialism

When a belief system is associated with the current atmosphere at a given time, changes in society bring changes in the popularity of the theory. It is here that the spiritualizing of end-time prophecy falls victim to changes in popular attitudes from generation to generation. In times of peace and prosperity, the future looks bright. But wars and rumors of war quickly change attitudes to fear and uncertainty.

Postmillennialism became very popular in the decades following Whitby’s new theory. But things changed drastically with the arrival of the twentieth century. World War I

caused postmillennialists to wonder if their explanation of Scripture was correct. Things seemed to be getting worse rather than better. Some tried to describe the first World War as the war to end all wars. But less than twenty-five years later, the world was engulfed in World War II. The holocaust—a catastrophic slaughter of thousands of Jews and Christians by a devilish dictator—was the final proof that the world was not getting better. Man’s inhumanity to fellow humans defined a darkened age. The expectation of an approaching golden age was shattered. Postmillennialism has been a minor interpretation of Bible prophecy since then. The parade of regional conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, and worldwide terrorism, involving most of the major nations of the world, has continued to challenge the possibility of a future near-perfect society.

A twentieth century teaching with many hallmarks of postmillennialism is found under a variety of names: *Kingdom Now*, *Dominion Theology*, *Reconstructionism*, or *God’s Authority (theonomy)*. Each of these names emphasizes a slightly different aspect of postmillennialism, but they all view the present age as the literal kingdom of God that should be governed for God by all true believers.

Kingdom Now teaches that our focus should be on making present society obedient in every way to God’s authority. There is no need to wait until a future millennium for God’s complete authority to be recognized. **Dominion Theology**^{kw} places emphasis on the belief that God has given believers dominion over all areas of human life, and they have an obligation to exercise that dominion. Christians “must subdue education, the arts, the sciences, government, the financial systems, and every other realm of human life, bringing it all under God’s dominion so true peace, goodness, justice, and righteousness prevail everywhere before Jesus will return” (Horton 1996, 164).

What is Christ’s commission to all of His followers?

Reconstructionism emphasizes the task of the church to change, or reconstruct, society to make it the embodiment of Old and New Testament principles and mandates. According to these interpretations—that Christ’s kingdom should now be in control of all human endeavors—Christians who only win souls and then disciple them to live righteous lives and bring others to Christ are not living up to the charge God has given each believer. The most mysterious of all these terms—**theonomy**^{kw} or theocracy—simply means these movements believe human governments should give full allegiance to God alone.

In America, we often hear the phrase, “separation of church and state.” Unfortunately, the idea is sometimes misused to say that no religion should be allowed to express its beliefs within the state. But that is not what the founding fathers of the United States intended. Instead, they wanted to make sure that no one religion became the religion

authorized by the government. But today atheists and agnostics would love nothing better than to outlaw Christianity.

What would happen if evangelical Christianity were to be imposed as the only recognized religion of a country?

The Kingdom Now and Dominion Theology proponents would like to make their understanding of Christianity the required religion of the land. They claim the Bible advocates such a government, and that the peace and righteousness of the millennium would then be a reality, and Jesus would return to be the ruler. But they explain away the Tribulation and Christ's mighty confrontation and defeat of Satan by spiritualizing the literal statement to mean the eternal struggle between good and evil.

Would a firm conviction that God's kingdom must come in its fullness in this Church Age seem to justify forcing nonbelievers to submit to a Christian theocracy? Having a goal that includes making any brand of Christianity (or any other religion) the required religion of the land presents many problems. Instead, we should follow the approach of the apostle Paul. With love, he sought to persuade people to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:14–21). The love of Christ is what guided him. He said that “by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

The biblical description of how the millennium of peace and righteousness will become a reality—by the sudden attack and defeat of Satan—is God's way of bringing His kingdom to full reality through His own intervention. Things will get worse before they get better. But God has His hand in all the affairs of earth's inhabitants. All glory to His name!

11.3

The Role of Dispensationalism

What is a “dispensation” in Bible history?

A historical review is appropriate as we begin our study of **dispensationalism** and premillennialism. As we have noted, the early church was definitely premillennial in its understanding of Bible prophecy. Jesus was expected to come back to earth to set up His millennial kingdom at any time. But Augustine’s spiritualizing or allegorizing the details of Bible prophecy (early fifth century) led to amillennialism—the denial of a literal 1,000 years of peace and righteousness on earth. The Protestant reformers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries moved back toward premillennialism and a more literal interpretation of Bible prophecy. But amillennialism in the Catholic Church and premillennialism in the Protestant churches were soon challenged by postmillennialism as advocated by Daniel Whitby (in the eighteenth century). Yet even before postmillennialism began to wane with the two twentieth-century World Wars, dispensationalism began restoring a renewed interest in premillennialism.

Identify the founder and popularizer of dispensationalism.

The Originators of Dispensationalism

In the early nineteenth century, John N. Darby, a leader of the British Plymouth Brethren movement wrote and taught that God deals with humans according to different requirements He places on them at different times in history. In North America, Darby’s teachings were picked up by C. I. Scofield, who propelled the new organization of Scripture into a widely accepted belief system. The Scofield Reference Bible defines a *dispensation* as “a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God” (Scofield 1901, 5).

How many dispensations
are there?

At the same time Scofield was teaching his view of Bible dispensations, Bible conferences, camp meetings, and informal Bible schools were becoming popular, beginning in the late nineteenth century. Hunger for the Word of God brought many believers to these meetings and classes where the Scofield approach to Bible study was widely used and accepted. Many evangelical and Pentecostal groups in the early twentieth century were strongly influenced by the Scofield approach to dispensationalism. A

paperback book, *Ages and Dispensations*, authored by Frank M. Boyd, was widely used in Assemblies of God schools and churches.

Indicate the effect of dispensationalism on premillennialism.

Traditional Dispensationalism and Bible History

Most Bible scholars agree that there are different time periods for God's dealing with humankind, but not necessarily the seven suggested by dispensationalists. It would be difficult to deny that God's dealing with the human race was different after the death and resurrection of Jesus from what it was before Jesus came to earth to die for our sins. So born-again Christians would acknowledge that there are at least two dispensations, though they might be hesitant to use the terminology, which has been so closely identified with the Darby-Scofield meaning of dispensationalism.

There is no direct biblical statement declaring that there are seven dispensations. If one recognizes that the seven dispensations provide a convenient means of looking at the history of God's dealings with humankind, there may be value in using the humanly-defined dispensations as an organizational device for studying Bible history. But we must not elevate a human system of organizing Bible truth to the level of divinely inspired biblical truth. One can believe and accept the divinely inspired Word of God without being able to recite the seven dispensations of C. I. Scofield.

To give tangible meaning to this reality, a quick look at Scofield's seven dispensations is appropriate. The seven are as follows:

Innocency	Before the Fall of Adam and Eve	Genesis 1:28
Conscience	From the Fall to Noah's Flood	Genesis 3:23
Human Government	From the Flood to Abraham's Call	Genesis 8:20
Promise	Abraham to the Giving of the Law	Genesis 12:1

Law	From Moses to Christ	Exodus 19:8
Grace	The Present Church Age	John 1:17
Kingdom	The Millennium	Ephesians 1:10

What two significant beliefs are held by both dispensationalists and premillennialists?

From this listing, it is easy to see how sincere, well-meaning believers might see some transitions as more significant than others. Most would agree that God's way of dealing with humans changed with the sacrificial death of Jesus. Some would agree that there was a significant change when Adam and Eve sinned, bringing original sin into the whole human race. Some would view end-time events after the Rapture as a significant dispensation. It is understandable that some Bible students might not see seven dispensations of equal significance, but nevertheless could recognize four or five dispensations. But, as we have already noted, agreeing on a single number should never be the criteria for Christian fellowship between believers.

Of far greater significance are other beliefs associated with dispensationalism. And in noting these points, we begin to see the influence that dispensationalism has had on premillennialism. Of first importance is the commitment to a literal interpretation of the details of biblical prophecy. Closely allied with this commitment is the belief that Israel, as a nation as well as a people, still has an end-time role to play in Tribulation and Millennium activity. A third distinction of earlier dispensationalism, that no longer holds the significance it once held, is recognizing a distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Some dispensationalists maintain that the "kingdom of heaven" refers to the kingdom Jesus will establish for Israel when He returns at the end of the Tribulation, while the "kingdom of God" is the universal rule of God that exists eternally on earth and in heaven. Thus, the church is sometimes seen as a heavenly people, while Israel is seen as an earthly people. But a close reading of "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" in the Gospels shows conclusively that both terms can be applied to the same eternal, universal rule of God.

Describe some deficiencies of strict dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism's Influence on Premillennialism

What is an
ultradispensationalist?

The present day premillennial position on end-time prophecy owes much to dispensationalism, though many of the more extreme teachings have been modified. It is obvious that dispensationalism encouraged the study of God's Word. A systematized and understandable explanation encourages Bible study and personal commitment far more quickly than a nebulous spiritualizing by different expositors proclaiming a variety of meanings. God may use a variety of methods to revive His church. But a love for, and regular study of, His Word is always important. Proponents of belief systems that choose to spiritualize Scriptures that seem impossible in a natural world (amillennialists and postmillennialists) often see dispensationalists as uninformed about literary conventions, such as symbolism and figurative language. But there are dispensational/premillennial prophecy students who fully understand literary conventions. Yet knowing that God is not bound by human limitations, they choose with full awareness to take God's Word literally, unless something in the passage indicates another meaning. Today, a vast number of evangelical and Pentecostal adherents are either dispensational or premillennial, or both. There is no doubt that C.I. Scofield contributed much to the evangelical and Pentecostal understanding of Bible prophecy.

There is another view on dispensations called ultradispensationalism, where proponents seem to find new dispensations to accommodate personal views. Some proponents of ultradispensationalism separate the traditional dispensation of grace (or the Church Age) into a dispensation of the Jewish church and a dispensation of the Pauline or Gentile church. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is in a sense the beginning a new dispensation. In this regard, one theologian writes,

What **ultradispensationalists** fail to recognize is that the distinguishableness of a dispensation is related to what God is doing, not to what He revealed at the time. It is certainly true that within the scope of any dispensation there is progressive revelation, and in the present one it is obvious that not all of what God was going to do was revealed

on the day of Pentecost. These are economies of God, not of man, and the limits of a dispensation are determined not by what any one person within that dispensation understood but by what may be understood now from the completed revelation of the Word. (Ryrie 1995, 156)

In the latter part of the twentieth century, there was a noticeable withdrawal from some of the extremes of dispensationalism. Without relinquishing a firm belief in a literal interpretation of Scripture, many premillennialists chose to be called “premls” rather than dispensationalists. They recognize that students of Scripture can approach Bible prophecy without recognizing a strict seven-dispensation scheme and still remain faithful to an inerrant and unchanging Word of God.

No matter how one judges the present contribution of dispensational teaching to Bible prophecy, we cannot deny the great contribution of dispensationalism to the current restoration of early church beliefs. We too look for a literal Jesus to come from a literal heaven, to resurrect the righteous dead and rapture the living righteous, taking us to a literal meeting in the air and a literal everlasting life in the presence of our beloved Lord. May the Lord hasten the day!

11.4

Commitment to Premillennialism

We come now to the position of the Assemblies of God in the controversy over interpretations of end-time events. So this would be a good time to review what we have studied and look ahead to the final chapters of this study. Two paragraphs in an official position paper of the Assemblies of God provide a compressed summary of what we believe. The passage is found in “The Kingdom of God as Described in Holy Scripture.”

We believe in the premillennial return of Christ before the thousand-year period described in Revelation 20. We believe that we are living in the last days of the present age; the next major fulfillment of Bible prophecy will be the Rapture, or physical removal, of the church from the earth (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). We believe that the rapture of the church is imminent (Mark 13:32–37), that it will take place before the Great Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:17–18; 5:9), and that it is the “Blessed Hope” (Titus 2:13) to which we look even while signs in the heavens and on earth signal the approaching end of this age (Luke 21:25–28).

The second coming of Christ includes the physical rapture of the saints followed by the visible return of Christ with His saints to reign on the earth for one thousand years (Zechariah 14:5; Matthew 24:27, 30; Revelation 1:7, 19:11–14, 20:1–6). Satan will be bound and inactive for the first time since his rebellion and fall (Revelation 20:2). This millennial reign will bring the salvation of Israel (Ezekiel 37:21–22; Zephaniah 3:19–

20; Romans 11:26–27) and the establishment of universal peace (Isaiah 11:6–9; Psalm 72:3–8; Micah 4:3–4) for the first time since before the fall of man. God’s rejection of Israel is not permanent. After the age of the Gentiles, God will re-graft Israel into His kingdom, and “so all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:24–26).

Those two brief paragraphs state clearly the Assemblies of God premillennial position. The points of this lesson are what Stanley M. Horton calls, “Key Issues for Premillennialists.” Some we have already studied in some detail; others we have not. We will make brief mention of the ones covered. The accompanying chart provides a brief comparison of the six issues as taught by amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism.

Key Issue	Premillennial Position	Amillennial and Postmillennial Positions
1. Prophecy Descriptions 2. Binding of Satan 3. First Resurrection 4. Time and Nature of Judgments 5. Future of Israel 6. Reign of Christ and saints on earth	Literal Reading of Prophecy Takes Place after the Tribulation At Rapture and Tribulation Martyrs Believers at Judgment Seat of Christ, before the Millennium Wicked at Great White Throne, after the Millennium Literally Restored in the Millennium In Millennium after Christ Returns	Figurative/symbolic interpretation of Prophecy Took Place at the Cross At a Person’s Conversion Only One General Judgment after a General Resurrection of both Righteous and Wicked No Longer in God’s Plan. Israel has been Replaced by the church In the Present Church Age

Summarize the premillennial position on literal interpretation of prophecy and the restoration of Israel.

Key Issues in Premillennialism

What is replacement theology?

Premillennialists are aware that the Bible uses symbols and figurative language. We do not believe the Antichrist will be a literal animal (beast). As a world leader he will be human, though inspired by satanic power. Scripture makes it clear that he will be a human acting at times like a beast. But recognizing the figurative in some instances does not give license to declare all of prophecy to be figurative of something that has happened in human history, or in the Christian experience. We have dealt with this matter in detail in earlier lessons, so we need not repeat what has already been said.

Amillennialists and postmillennialists teach “replacement theology”—that the church has replaced Israel as the recipient of the many promises of a restored Israel. But there are too many unconditional promises to Israel, in spite of the unfaithfulness of the people as a whole, to arbitrarily declare that God has turned His back on His chosen people. It was through a humble Jewish mother that God sent His only Son to earth to die that “whoever wishes [can] take the free gift” of salvation (Revelation 22:17).

Horton (1996) gives the biblical support for the unchangeable plan God has for Israel.

The promise of their restoration is unconditional. It is based on God’s promise and covenant given to Abraham (Genesis 15:18–20; 17:8; compare Nehemiah 9:7–8); the promise of the land is specific.... Ezekiel 36 also indicates they will come back to the land first in unbelief. Then, after they are in the land, God will bring about a spiritual restoration and put His Spirit in them. Chapter 37 confirms this by indicating that the bones come together without life, so Israel comes together without spiritual life. Then God does a further work.... We do not know how long it will be after the restoration in unbelief that the spiritual restoration will come, but come it will. (193–194)

The world may already have witnessed the return to the land in unbelief. The founding of the nation of Israel in 1948 is seen by many as an event of prophetic importance.

Contrast premillennialism with several spiritualizing views.

Premillennialism and Satan’s Binding

What Bible verses remind us that Satan actively opposes God's working in the world?

The figurative meaning of Satan's binding (Revelation 20:1–3) was treated in the lesson on amillennialism. Postmillennialists also believe that Satan was bound as a result of Christ's victory on the Cross, a victory affirmed by His resurrection. The binding, however, for them means a limiting of Satan's powers now rather than a complete restriction of his evil work throughout 1,000 years of confinement. When a future millennium is denied, and Satan is said to have been bound at Calvary, then Satan's evil work at the present time must be explained. So it is limited rather than completely prohibited.

We are reminded by Peter, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8–9). Though Christ gained the victory at the Cross, every person is still given a choice between Christ and Satan. We know that even now "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). So we have to put on the full armor of God (6:13).

How do we know the first resurrection is bodily rather than a spiritual resurrection (salvation)?

The first resurrection (Revelation 20:5–6) is "spiritualized" by amillennialists and postmillennialists to mean the new life given when a person experiences the new birth or salvation. Premillennialists see it as the resurrection of the righteous dead when Christ comes to "snatch away" the church at the time of the Rapture.

The "first resurrection" consists of believers over whom "the second death has no power" (20:6). They will reign with Christ for 1,000 years. "The rest of the dead" who are raised after the Millennium for their judgment are the wicked dead. If the first resurrection is salvation, the resurrection of the wicked cannot mean their salvation at the end of 1,000 years. Jesus himself spoke of two resurrections, those who have done good and those who have done evil (John 5:29). Amillennialists and postmillennialists teach a general resurrection, at which time both the righteous and wicked dead are raised.

Amillennialists and postmillennialists believe in a general judgment that happens at the time of the general resurrection. They base their belief on the words of Jesus in responding to the angry Jews trying to kill Him for breaking the Sabbath. "A time is

coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28–29). Instead of giving a specific timetable for each resurrection, however, Jesus was reminding the angry Jews that judgment was coming for both the righteous and wicked. Where the Jews opposing Jesus would be found was obvious. So we cannot build a time frame for the judgments on this one passage. Other passages clearly indicate separate resurrections and judgments for the righteous and the wicked dead—the judgment seat of Christ for believers after the Rapture (2 Corinthians 5:10) and the Great White Throne Judgment for the wicked (Revelation 20:11).

Amillennialists and postmillennialists spiritualize Revelation 5:10 (“they will reign on the earth”) to mean a spiritual reign in the current Church Age. Contrary to the context of Revelation 20:4–6, they claim that the scene is in heaven, not on earth. Yet Zechariah’s prophecy of Christ speaks clearly of earthly spaces. “He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth” (Zechariah 9:10). There is a millennium on earth when we will reign with Christ!

Relate the importance of premillennialism to one’s faith.

Personalizing Premillennialism

Premillennialists have hope, not a passing hope that things on earth are getting better and will continue to do so until Jesus comes for His saints. Instead, it is a hope based on prophecies already fulfilled in Christ’s first coming, promising that prophecies yet unfulfilled will also come to pass as foretold. As the things of this world become worse, promises of the future with Christ shine brighter. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus himself and His ultimate victory over Satan and his evil dominion.

Hope fosters faith. We know God’s promises are true. We have tested them, tried them, and found their Source to be faithful. What He has done for the patriarchs of old, for His chosen people Israel, and for every sinner saved by faith in Christ’s death and resurrection—these all build faith in the promises of God’s Word. We claim God’s personal promises each day, and with the same faith we anticipate His promises of the things He is preparing for us to share with Him throughout a glorious eternity.

But our premillennial belief also includes some dark times for those who do not know Christ as personal Savior. The Tribulation is not just a gripping story from another planet. It will happen right here on earth! Someone has said, “I don’t worry about the coming Tribulation, because we won’t be here.” That may be true. But it adds a powerful

exclamation point to our Great Commission to go into all the world taking the gospel to as many as will hear us. If we are content to let souls go to hell, as long as our future is secure, the mind of Christ is not in us. We should have the same burden our precious Lord has for the lost of the world. We must pray for the lost, reach out to the lost, and love them with Christ's love. Our premillennial belief must infuse our ministry for Christ and to others.

12

The Millennial Kingdom

As we begin our in-depth study of the Millennium, we must review the sequence leading up to this indescribable one thousand-year period. When the trumpet sounds at the Rapture, the saints, both living and dead, are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. While seven years of increasing tribulation settle on the earth, Christ and His redeemed from past ages are with Christ in heaven. The Bridegroom and the bride are united forever and ever. Rewards for faithful service are passed out. Preparations are then made to replace the depraved inhabitants of earth who have blindly followed Satan and Antichrist. Armageddon is the battle that signals the coming end of the conflict between good and evil dating back to Adam and Eve. Satan is bound and his evil cohorts consigned to their eternal punishment. As we will see, after the Millennium, Satan will be allowed one last effort to test the allegiance of those born during the Millennium, and then the end of all conflict.

In comparison with our present life of trials, tests, sicknesses, physical death, and struggles with Satan's temptations, the Millennium will seem perfect. We must remember, however, that the Millennium is but a relatively short period before the eternal bliss of the ages beyond, when we will dwell in new heavens and earth—with no more

threat of sin or its promoter, ever! Our study of the Millennium in the two lessons of this chapter will only introduce us to this wonderful time when the true kingdom of God will operate in God's perfect tomorrow. I can hardly wait!

Lesson 12.1 The Central Figure in the Millennium

Objectives

- 12.1.1 Outline the relationship of the bride and Bridegroom in the Millennium.*
- 12.1.2 Identify the names and titles Christ is given in the Millennium.*
- 12.1.3 Describe Israel's relationship with Christ in the Millennium.*

Lesson 12.2 The Government in the Millennium

Objectives

- 12.2.1 Describe the relationship between the Millennium and the kingdom of God.*
- 12.2.2 Indicate how leaders will be chosen to carry out divine directives.*

Lesson 12.3 Activities of the Saints in the Millennium

Objective

- 12.3.1 Describe the lifestyle of Christ's subjects in the Millennium.*

12.1	The Central Figure in the Millennium
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Some married couples, even born-again Christians, find themselves in less than ideal marriages. For them, the description of Christ as a Bridegroom desiring a love relationship with all His children is hard to grasp. And if one has come to think of God as a demanding father who requires impossible obedience from his children, the comparison may seem even less appropriate. But God can transform unhappy marriages just as He transforms desperate lives shackled by sin. If your present marriage (or that of your parents, if you are single) does not lend itself to seeing Christ as a very loving and considerate Savior, the attempt in this study is to reveal Christ as all He is and all He can be—Christ Jesus, the most intimate Companion you have ever known.

Outline the relationship of the bride and Bridegroom in the Millennium.

Reign in the Millennium

Why is the Bridegroom/bride picture so appropriate for the relationship between Christ and the believer?

The marriage of Christ and the church, the Bridegroom and His bride, takes place in heaven while the Tribulation rages on earth. From that ceremony of eternal commitment the Husband and His wife, the King and His queen, are inseparable. “Til death do us part” is promised in the earthly marriage vow, but there will be no parting or end to this holy marriage! The bride adores her Husband.

As we read the majestic descriptions of Christ as the King of the whole earth during the Millennium, we must never forget the marriage relationship. The divine love that never lets us go in our earthly life will certainly be just as strong through the eternal ages. When Jesus returns to earth to confront and defeat Satan at Armageddon, His bride is with Him. But the saints do nothing but swell the host that comes back with Jesus. It is our great Redeemer/Husband/King who fights the battle for all His followers. What a privilege to have been one of His faithful followers in this life!

We must never forget the personal relationship we will have with Christ as we look at His triumphal reign for 1,000 years. We are wed to the King, and His banner over us is “Love.” The words of the chorus “I’m my Beloved’s and He is mine” give us a beautiful picture of this loving relationship.

Identify the names and titles Christ is given in the Millennium.

Christ’s Names and Titles

How can we reconcile the image of Jesus as a strong worldwide monarch with being a gentle, understanding, and compassionate personal friend?

Hoyt (1969) introduces the magnificence of the Christ who reigns during the Millennium: “No amount of space could do justice to this Person. His names and titles indicate that He will be both human and divine” (179). In the Old Testament, Messiah is called “the son of man” (Daniel 7:13) and a “servant” (Isaiah 42:1–6). But He is also a person of divine authority. He is our judge, our lawgiver and our king (Isaiah 33:22). He is “the Anointed One, the ruler” (Daniel 9:25). He is the “Prince of princes” (Daniel 8:25). He is “the Redeemer” (Isaiah 59:20), “the sun of righteousness” (Malachi 4:2), and “the Sovereign LORD” (Isaiah 40:10).

The reigning King over the Millennium can be severe when appropriate, but also gentle. He rules the nations “with an iron scepter” (Psalm 2:9). But in one of the most touching passages of Scripture, “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart” (Isaiah 40:11). The Millennium will provide a full manifestation of Christ’s unsurpassed glory and grace.

Describe Israel’s relationship with Christ in the Millennium.

Israel Redeemed

The contrast between Christ of the first coming and Christ of the second coming is vastly different. The suffering Servant who came to earth to die that all might be set free from the bondage of sin is worthy to be King, and this will be His role during the Millennium.

What Old Testament prophet provides the best portrayal of King Jesus as a suffering servant?

Isaiah’s prophecy of the suffering Servant is eloquent. Remember, it was written over 700 years before Jesus was born and is expressed from an Israeli perspective.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us

peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isaiah 53:2–7).

Though He died alone, His sacrifice was for all the world—Jew and Gentile alike.

Isaiah’s prophecy of the suffering Servant tells the sad story of Israel’s rejection of Christ and His message of redemption for them. Men, especially the Jews, despised and rejected Him (53:3). We, as God’s chosen people, esteemed Him not (53:3). We considered Him stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God (53:4). And we Gentiles cannot justly point to anyone more than ourselves to bear the blame. Though there may be more Gentiles than Jews following Christ today, the record of the entire human race in rejecting Christ is heartbreaking. But God, fully aware of Israel’s disobedience and rejection of Christ, has promised a brighter day—a day when “all Israel will be saved ... when I take away their sins” (Romans 11:26). It will be glory just to see a restored relationship between Christ and God’s chosen people.

What role will Israel play in the Millennium?

Amillennialists and postmillennialists do not see Israel having a significant role as a nation in the Millennium. The Old Testament promises of a restored Israel are so many that the literal fulfillment of the prophecies cannot be ignored. Various Old Testament covenants will only be fulfilled in the Millennium. First must come the regathering of the elect (Israel) from all the nations to which they have been scattered. There will evidently be a great conversion of Israel at this time. When they accept Christ as Savior, they can then enter the Millennium.

Will this be a unique time that brings Israel alone to the forefront?

Isaiah describes the honored role Israel will have in the Millennium. “The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’S hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate” (Isaiah 62:2–4). We can only speculate on how a despised people so

quickly become such faithful representatives of Christ. They perhaps will have delegated leadership roles that help them establish this reputation.

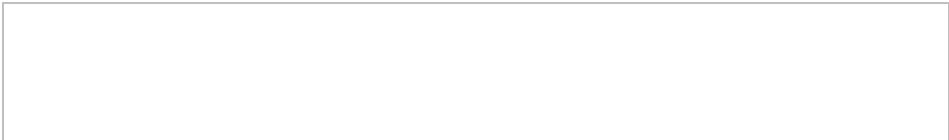
There will be no dissent or dissatisfaction with the righteous reign of Christ during the Millennium. There is no suggestion in the Scriptures that human response to the special blessings enjoyed by Israel would lead to anything other than a rejoicing. Envy and jealousy are absent. Every last inhabitant will know what Israel has contributed to their faith through the birth of the baby Jesus. As Isaiah prophesied, Israel will be held in great respect. Most likely, there will not be the great distinction between Jew and Gentile that our fallen world knows. Horton (1996) sums up the possible relationships in the Millennium. “This does not mean there will be competition between Israel and the rest of the church. Each will bless the other, for ‘God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect’ (Hebrews 11:40). This perfection of God’s purposes for Israel and the church will find fulfillment as they are together under Jesus Christ, their Lord and King, as he reigns over all the earth during the Millennium” (209).

Christ is the central figure in the Millennium. As the member of the Godhead who walked on earth, sent by God, He will know the victories we have gained in spite of the trials we have faced. We will not need a high priest then, but the One who has been our great high priest representing us to the Father (Hebrews 11:40) will still be the source of our life in the Millennium. To Him be all the glory!

<h2>12.2</h2>	<h3>The Government in the Millennium</h3>
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In one of the great Old Testament prophecies about the birth of Messiah/Christ, there is an unusual prediction for a baby: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders” (Isaiah 9:6). There is no indication in the earthly life of Jesus that a government was then upon His shoulders. But in the Millennium it will be.

Most of the descriptive names by which Christ will be called can only be used in the Millennium and in the eternity beyond. “He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (v. 6). And then His government is mentioned again, “Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end” (v. 7). It all begins with the Millennium.



Describe the relationship between the Millennium and the kingdom of God.

A Tangible Manifestation

How does Scripture describe the kingdom of God?

Is there any difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven?

The **kingdom of God** is greater than Israel; it is greater than the church. It is greater even than the Millennium. A kingdom must have three things: (1) a ruler with authority and power, (2) subjects responsible to the ruler, and (3) a domain where that authority prevails. The Assemblies of God has a position paper titled, “The Kingdom of God as Described in Holy Scripture” (Where We Stand: The Official Position Papers of the Assemblies of God, Paper 16). It can also be found on the Internet at the Assemblies of God web site: www.ag.org. The paper describes the concept of the Kingdom in the Old and New Testaments, the nature of the Kingdom now, and the Kingdom as a future reality.

There seems to be no distinction in Scripture between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Some Bible scholars note that Matthew is the only New Testament writer who uses “kingdom of heaven”—over thirty times. Four times he uses “kingdom of God,” without any change of meaning. It is also noted that Matthew was writing to Jews, who held the name “God” in special reverence. They would often substitute a word like “heaven” for the word that was not to be treated lightly by overuse. Matthew may have been respecting this Jewish custom.

The kingdom of God has both a spiritual and a physical aspect. In the present Church Age, the Kingdom in this world is primarily spiritual. When a sinner accepts Jesus Christ as personal Savior, he or she invites Christ to be the ruler of every part of his or her life. But we need only to look about us at a sinful society to know that there is also another kingdom, that of Satan (Matthew 12:26, Luke 11:18). Yet just before the Millennium begins, the ruler of Satan’s kingdom will be bound for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1–3). So the Millennium is the first time we see both the spiritual and the physical expressions of the kingdom of God coming together since the creation of the sinless Adam and Eve.

When we pray as Jesus taught, “Your kingdom come,” how will that prayer be answered?

The kingdom of God is everlasting. The psalmist David wrote, “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations” (Psalm 145:13). It is universal, or over everything: “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19). In the Millennium, we will see the universal Kingdom fulfilled, not just a future promise.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). The present spiritual Kingdom is not yet what it will be when the fullness of the universal Kingdom rises unchallenged in the Millennium. Satan and his evil rebellion against God will be silenced. The everlasting kingdom of God will be fully visible. Our God reigns, both now spiritually and forever more literally!

Indicate how leaders will be chosen to carry out divine directives.

The Perfect Theocracy

In what three functions of government will Christ operate during the Millennium?

The concept of a theocracy draws a strong negative reaction from most of the world. When they hear the word, they think of born-again Christians lording over some religious group that is totally opposed in heart, beliefs, and lifestyle to the commands and love of God. And since many do not believe in God, they see those who advocate such a government as using religion for selfish reasons. Some would not object to a monarchy, or complete sovereignty by one non-Christian person. But God, or His representative, should not be recognized as the sovereign ruler. Satan uses people to express his rebellion against God and His kingdom.

In the Millennium, all government functions are the prerogative of Christ. Isaiah describes the three-fold functions of good government: the making of laws, the execution of those laws, and the judicial oversight. “There the LORD will be our Mighty One.... For the Lord is our judge [judicial], the Lord is our lawgiver [legislative], the Lord is our king [executive]; it is he who will save us” (Isaiah 33:21–22).

In the Millennium, the theocracy under Christ will be the best example of government the earth has ever seen. Christ’s reign will be marked by perfect righteousness and justice (Isaiah 11:4–5). Pentecostals will appreciate the fact that “the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him [Christ]—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge” (Isaiah 11:2). Such a wise and anointed Christ will bring glory to His reign.

Christ himself stated the criteria for those who will reign with Him in the Millennium. “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21). Positions of authority under Christ will be assigned as a reward for faithfulness in whatever Christ may have called believers to do in this life. “The Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him” (Isaiah 40:10). Christ knows our faithfulness even now, and He never forgets to reward appropriately, if not in this life, then certainly in the Millennium and beyond.

When the disciples asked Jesus what they would receive for their faithfulness in following Him, Jesus’ reply was direct: “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones.... And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (Matthew 19:28–30). Christ is a perfect bookkeeper when it comes to remembering faithfulness. The Old Testament saints, the Church Age saints, and the saints martyred in the Tribulation will receive their just rewards.

After seeing Satan thrown into the Abyss and imprisoned for 1,000 years, John had another vision of what is going to happen in the Millennium. “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge” (Revelation 20:4). The word “judge” often means “to rule” in the Old Testament. But judging is an important aspect of ruling. These judges or rulers include all believers from the Church Age who have remained faithful. Then John sees another group, those who had been martyred in the Tribulation for refusing to worship or obey the Antichrist. They along with the Church Age saints “reigned with Christ a thousand years” (20:4).

Are we nurturing pride and ambition as we serve in faithfulness now, while we hope in the promise that we will rule with Christ during the Millennium?

Judging and reigning with Christ will be the reward for faithfulness while the church was on earth and for overcoming Satan’s attempts to lure them away from faithfully following Christ.

On one occasion when Jesus and the disciples were discussing rewards for following Christ, Peter asked, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” (Matthew 19:27). Jesus’ answer looked beyond any immediate reward: “When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones” (19:28). And all who have left possessions or family for Christ’s sake “will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (19:29). Then Jesus concluded with words that must have set the disciples thinking. “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (19:30). Those who have been first in receiving public honor and high position in this life may not be the ones given the high positions in the Millennium and eternal ages. And those who have been faithful in small things, and in serving others in the name of Jesus, may be the ones who reign in the higher positions with Christ. There is no place for pride or self-promotion in this life. Christ will make judges and rulers of those who have learned in their earthly lives to give themselves in behalf of others. They have the humble attitude of Christ who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When God calls us home, through death or the Rapture, may we be among those who have been faithful overcomers.

12.3

Activities of the Saints in the Millennium

Not everyone will be a judge or a ruler representing Christ in the Millennium. There will likely be those who were saved in their lifetime, but for various reasons were not as fruitful as they might have been had they yielded their hearts and lives more fully to God and the work of His Spirit. What will those who have not been given leadership roles be doing for a thousand years? While we do not have a complete picture of the Millennium, we do have some glimpses of what will be taking place.

Describe the lifestyle of Christ's subjects in the Millennium.

Worship During the Millennium

True believers love to worship. That does not mean they always love to worship the way others do. Some love loud, demonstrative worship. Others love quiet meditation. But loving to be in the presence of Christ should come naturally to born-again believers.

Satan seeks the worship of any who will give it to him. He even tempted Jesus by offering Him the kingdoms of the world, "So if you worship me, it will all be yours" (Luke 4:7). Jesus responded with the timeless truth, "It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only" (4:8). The first commandment made clear who should and who should not be worshipped. "You shall not bow down ... or worship [an idol or other gods]; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5). People in this life may actually be "worshipping" Satan when they put possessions and pleasures before their commitment to Christ.

Worship will be a major activity in the Millennium. So now is a good time to evaluate our love of, and participation in worship. Worship and praise are the currency of heaven. Throughout the visions John sees of scenes in heaven, there is lightning, peals of thunder, and loud voices often shouting praises to God (Revelation 10:3–4; 11:15, 19; 16:18). Will we be comfortable in such responses to God's glory and presence? It will certainly be much easier in the Millennium when we will be part of a great crowd witnessing to the majesty and beauty of Christ. But it would not hurt to let our praises begin even now. As the Holy Spirit leads one yielded vessel to express praise to our Redeemer, others are encouraged to step out. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). And liberty in spiritual worship is so edifying and uplifting. The Millennium will be ringing with praise.

What will the atmosphere of worship be like during the Millennium?

An unusual temple will play an important role in the worship and spiritual atmosphere of the Millennium. Ezekiel gives the details in several chapters (40–46). What he describes does not match any temple that has ever existed. It is much larger, with a distinct design. The architectural description is so detailed that it must be taken as literal,

not symbolic or figurative. But it has one detail that has puzzled Bible scholars throughout the Church Age. It mentions animal sacrifices.

There will be no need for animal sacrifices to atone for sin because Christ's sacrifice did that on the Cross. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). Later in the same passage Christ's sacrifice is related to the end-time. "He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself" (9:26). Christ's death and resurrection for our sins began the final age of human history. The sacrifice is complete. Only the total elimination of Satan and his evil remains to be accomplished, according to God's timetable. Though there is not New Testament reference to clarify this point, if literal animal sacrifices are used during the Millennium, perhaps they will serve as constant reminders of Christ's suffering and death to provide our salvation. Every day in the Millennium will be a memorial day of Christ's great sacrifice.

What is the Feast of Tabernacles and why would this Old Testament feast be part of the spiritual activity during the Millennium?

Another part of the worship in the Millennium will be the Feast of Tabernacles as described by Zechariah. "Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain" (Zechariah 14:16–17).

Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Millennium will assist all subjects in identifying with and respecting Israel's past dependence on God. It should be an encouragement for them to remember their own dependence on God, both in the past and in their millennial relationship with Christ. The worship and praise will obviously be vital and inspiring for all! Is this not a reality today? Or have times of praise, worship, and communion with God, like the seed in the parable of the soils, been choked out by "the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things" (Mark 4:19)? May each heart choose to make it otherwise!

Surprise! Did you know there will be disobedience during the Millennium? Resurrected believers are perfected but some unbelievers who enter the millennium will not do as Christ legislates and requires. Satan, of course, is bound, so it is not his influence that prompts the disobedience. It is just human nature. It is likely for such persons as these that Satan will be released briefly after the Millennium to test their true devotion. But for the majority of faithful who have passed through their earthly time of testing and been declared faithful overcomers, the Millennium will be a peaceful and prosperous time. Any

disobedience will fall far short of the evil that Satan would have prompted if He had been free to work his evil designs.

Palestine and the World

What is the significance of the frequent mention of rain in dry areas?

If you have been to Israel or seen very many photographs of the countryside of Israel or the Palestinian Authority, you know that most of the area lacks the rainfall necessary to produce flourishing vegetation. But according to Bible prophecy, that will all change. Christ's return to defeat the forces of Satan and Antichrist is described in Zechariah: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south" (Zechariah 14:4). This massive change in the land surface will allow a river to flow out from Jerusalem to water the land (Ezekiel 47:1–12). "Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing" (47:12). There will also be abundant rainfall (Isaiah 30:23; 41:17–18) and streams of water in the desert (35:6). This promised restoration of the land is especially significant following the great destruction and slaughter from the battle of Armageddon.

This beautiful restored nature is described by the prophets for the entire earth, not just Palestine. The animal world will be changed.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy. (Isaiah 11:6–9)

Violence will no longer stalk the streets of the world's cities.

Spirit-filled believers can look forward to the special presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's work in the Millennium will be more powerful and more wonderful than ever (Isaiah 35:10; 51:11; Ezekiel 11:19; Joel 2:18–32). We have a first installment of this now, but then we shall enjoy a greater fullness in connection with the Lord's return and the restoration of Israel in the land. What worship and praise, what spiritual fervor, what glorious gifts, what holy love, the Spirit will minister through us all! What joy and peace He will bring!" (Horton 1996, 210)

Isaiah gives us a beautiful picture of relationships between subjects and their benevolent Ruler.

In the last days the mountain of the LORD'S temple will be established ... and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." ... He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Isaiah 2:2-4)

What a financial savings when nations do not have to arm themselves with the latest weapons of destruction! No longer will subjects need to worry that saying "Peace and safety" will only bring sudden destruction (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

Can you understand why John the Revelator responded to Christ's words, "I am coming soon" with "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20)? It was a passionate cry for the better day we will see in the Millennium.

13

The Final States of the Righteous and the Wicked

The Bible says very little about eternity and the new heaven and earth. After the space given to the seven years of the Tribulation and the thousand years of the Millennium, one might expect more than a portion of the last two chapters of the Bible. Walvoord (1993) gives his opinion for this brevity: "Scripture was written to help us live our lives on earth in keeping with God's will. The vision of the future is sufficiently enticing to encourage us in our earthly walk with the prospect of being in the presence of the Lord forever. And that is what eternity will be—forever" (174).

The ultimate end of evil is actually given more space than our eternity with God. Since Satan and his evil designs are such a significant part of life right now, we know he must first be eliminated if we are to enjoy a peaceful eternal life. The glories of the eternal future are promised to those who overcome. Jesus told His disciples, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And because He has overcome the world, He has paved the way for our overcoming Satan and the world. John tells us how we overcome Satan. "The word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father

but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:14–17).

Lesson 13.1 The New Heaven and the New Earth

Objectives

- 13.1.1 Outline the final test when Satan is released.*
- 13.1.2 Compare and contrast the Eternal Ages and the Millennium.*
- 13.1.3 Describe the New Jerusalem and its location.*
- 13.1.4 Summarize the crowning glory of our eternal reward.*

Lesson 13.2 The Final State of the Wicked

Objectives

- 13.2.1 Examine the judgment exacted by the compassionate Christ.*
- 13.2.2 Describe the scene of the Great White Throne Judgment.*

13.1

The New Heaven and the New Earth

John the Revelator begins his vision of eternity, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1). But we have to go elsewhere in Scripture to see what happens to this heaven and earth that is mentioned. Peter gives the most descriptive account. “The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare [or “burned up”].... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:10–13). Jesus himself said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mark 13:31).

Why must the heavens and the earth be destroyed? Why would the present earth, rejuvenated as in the Millennium, not be satisfactory? Satan and his evil influence would be permanently removed, but fallen humans have polluted the earth and the heavens. Wherever we look today, we see evidence that our earth bears the curse of sin. The degradation is such that destroying the old and beginning anew is God’s design for our future abode.

Outline the final test when Satan is released.

Satan's Release for a Brief Time of Tests for the Nations

Why would God release Satan to lead more people to their destruction?

The story of the new heaven and new earth, the eternal destiny of believers, begins with the final judgment of Satan. At the end of the thousand years, we are told, “Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth” (Revelation 20:7–8).

Since God is omnipotent, but Satan is not, one might wonder why God releases Satan to lead more people to their destruction. The same question could be raised about God allowing Satan to lead Adam and Eve into original sin. If we knew for sure why God let Satan loose in the Garden of Eden, we would likely have our answer to Satan's release at the end of the Millennium.

Free will requires that humans have choices. God desires the love and obedience of the human beings He created. Yet He wants that love to come from the heart, not because there are no other choices. So God allows Satan to tempt and test believers, though He has promised, “He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Some have accused God of creating evil, just because He allowed it when He could have prevented it. But such an accusation is borne out of a misunderstanding of who God is. Angels had their opportunity to choose to follow in the presence of God's holiness and will or stand in support of resisting God and His will. That point of decision has continued for each group. Satan chose to oppose God. But as in Joseph's testimony, God can turn what is intended for harm into good (Genesis 50:20). We must commit our lives to Him to find that blessing.

Human nature is not changed by a near-perfect Millennium. For 1,000 years, humans have had no choice but to obey Christ. The release of Satan reveals the true heart of many. Satan goes out “to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth ... to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves” (Revelation 20:8–9). But Satan is still no match for God. “Fire came down from heaven

and devoured them” (20:9). If there is a need, review Lesson 12 on the culmination of this last battle.

The final end to Satan’s evil challenge to God’s authority is quick. “The devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (20:10). Never again will Satan trouble the saints or deceive the uncommitted. The stage is set for a new heaven and a new earth, where sin cannot enter.

Compare and contrast the Eternal Ages and the Millennium.

Blessings of the Eternal Ages

What does Christ mean when He says, “I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life”?

In his vision, John sees “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1). Immediately he sees a huge city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven. Before John can begin his description of the holy city, he hears a voice announcing some of the blessings of eternity with God.

- God will dwell on the new earth with His people (21:3); from Creation through the Millennium, God’s throne has been in heaven.
- “He will wipe every tear from their eyes” (21:4); the things that bring tears in this life and in the Millennium will be removed.
- “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (21:4); these are part of “the old order of things,” the former heaven and earth.
- There will be no temple in the city because God and the Lamb are the temple (21:22).
- The voice from the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (21:5).

As we read and reread the Bible prophecies about the future, we too should think of our own standing with Christ. Are we content just to get into heaven, even if we have no righteous works that God can reward? If so, we may not be ready. It is the thirsty, wanting

more of God, who are given the water of life. The next verse says, “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” The majestic God of the future wants each of us to be an important son or daughter in His family.

Describe the New Jerusalem and its location.

The New Jerusalem

John is reminded of his first view of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2). An angel says to him, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” John is carried away in the Spirit for a special view of the city. “It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal” (21:11). The next twenty-two verses of Revelation 21 and 22 describe this beautiful piece of eternity. “Everything about the city is amazing and magnificent. It would be impossible for any human architect or builder to produce such a city, but we must keep in mind that its ‘builder [designer, architect] and maker [craftsman, creator] is God’ (Hebrews 11:10). He prepared the city and its foundations. Its symmetry, size, perfection and beauty reflect not only His glory, but the wonderful love and care He has for His people” (Horton 1991, 318).

What present-world items are used to describe the glory of the New Jerusalem?

The city is huge. It would reach halfway across the United States (about 1,380 miles), though it rests on a new earth. It is called a city foursquare, either a cube or a pyramid with various levels contained within. It will have sufficient room for all believers who have ever lived. Of course, we cannot comprehend all the details of how Christ’s followers will live, but the divine Architect certainly prepares the city adequately.

Twelve different jewels and precious stones are mentioned: jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst. There is no temple “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:22). The city had no need for sunlight or moonlight, for God’s glory lights the city, and “the Lamb is its lamp” (21:23). “There will be no night there” (21:25); the gates are never closed, and spiritual bodies need no sleep. “Nothing impure

will ever enter [the city], ... only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (21:27). A river flows from the throne of God (22:1–2). “No longer will there be any curse” (22:3).

The limitations of our bodies here on earth will be replaced by a dynamic infusion of supernatural ability and power.

Summarize the crowning glory of the believer’s eternal reward.

Our Eternal Reward

An eternity of doing the same things for countless thousands upon thousands of years may sound monotonous. But God is of variety. There will be new ways of worshipping our Lord. There will be new ministries we can render to Christ and to our fellow believers. There will be pleasures mortals cannot even imagine.

We think that modern technology has enhanced life here on earth now. But God is the greatest architect, inventor, teacher, artist, musician, pastor (or whatever creative ability you can imagine) that our world has ever known. There will be no boredom in heaven.

Throughout eternity we should be singing a song of the redeemed (Revelation 14:3). It could be something like this: “Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; Redeemed through His infinite mercy, His child and forever, I am.... . I think of my blessed Redeemer, I think of Him all the day long; I sing, for I cannot be silent; His love is the theme of my song” (Crosby 1882). We will especially shout the words, “His child forever, I am.”

13.2	The Final State of the Wicked
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We saw some terrible judgments poured out in the Tribulation. But Satan was then alive and deceiving the people. So it was easy to picture the judgments as being against Satan and those who willingly chose to follow him. But at this point in end-time events, Satan has been permanently cast into the lake of fire, or burning sulfur, where he “will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). Our attention turns now to the ones Satan deceived while they were alive. They died without accepting Christ as their personal Savior.

Is God just in condemning to eternal punishment a person who, in a short lifetime, neglected the opportunity to forsake sin and follow Christ? That question has concerned many, to the point that some have believed and taught universalism—the belief that everyone, including Satan and his fallen angels, will eventually be saved.

To deal with this false assumption and other unbiblical explanations of the nature of “eternal punishment,” the Assemblies of God has produced an official position paper titled, “Eternal Punishment.” You can find the paper in *Where We Stand: The Official Position Papers of the Assemblies of God* or on the Assemblies of God website by going to www.ag.org. The material that follows includes some of the ideas covered in the paper.

*Examine the judgment exacted by the
compassionate Christ.*

Judgment by Christ

Define a wicked person, according
to the Bible.

The time of the resurrection of the wicked dead is treated as a parenthetical statement in Revelation 20:5. John emphasizes the resurrection of those beheaded in the Tribulation for their testimony and refusal to worship Antichrist. “They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (20:4). Then the parenthesis: (“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended”). Their resurrection, however, is not to reign with Christ, but to be judged for their wickedness.

We commonly speak of those who have accepted Christ as their Savior as the righteous. Those who have rejected Christ are often identified as the wicked. Yet the word “wicked,” as either a noun or adjective, is used in the New Testament fewer than twenty-five times. The surprising fact is that “wicked” is not used even once in Revelation (KJV) and only once in the NIV (Revelation 2:2), but not in the prophecy passages of the book. The word evil is used once in Revelation 2:2 (KJV) and twice as “evil spirits” (16:3, 18:2). It is in the Old Testament that “the wicked” are identified as those who oppose God and whose deeds are evil. Though we often think of a wicked person as being in the likeness of Satan, that is not a required meaning.

Revelation 21:8 gives a good definition of the wicked. “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” We have a natural tendency to rank some sins as worse than others. Most would place the vile, the murderers, the immoral, the idolaters, and those who practice magic arts at the top of the list. Liars and the unbelieving might be close behind. But what about the cowardly? These are fearful persons because of their lack of faith. The list describes who will not be in the New Jerusalem but instead will be condemned to the lake of fire. One pastor described the ones judged guilty at the Great White Throne Judgment as out-and-out sinners, self-righteous people, procrastinators who put off accepting Christ, those who have never heard the gospel (though their punishment will be less severe), and unsaved church members (Rogers 2004, 233–234). Out-and-out sinners would be the wicked in anyone’s definition. But God includes the self-righteous, the procrastinators, and unsaved church members. Help us, Lord, not to be found in any of these groups.

The Wrath of God and the Love of God are both essential attributes of deity. Each person freely chooses the attribute—wrath or love—he or she will receive. God is love, but He also despises evil. His attribute of justice demands that He punish evil, not love it. He loves the sinner, but hates the sin. When the sinner asks forgiveness of God, as provided by Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection, God blots out the sin and remembers it no more (Isaiah 43:25). But until one is saved by God’s forgiving grace, the sin penalty remains. God is not willing that any should perish. He gives each person his or her lifetime, no matter how long or short, to accept that grace. But God’s wrath is certain when the possibility of redemption is gone.

The Book of Life, also called “the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27), includes the name of every person who has come to Christ to receive forgiveness of sins committed. Every time a sinner accepts Christ as Savior, there is “a new name written down in glory,” as the old song says. To each overcoming Christian in the Sardis church, Christ promised, “I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels” (Revelation 3:5). This is the book that condemns the sinners as they stand before the austere Judge at the Great White Throne.

Describe the scene of the Great White Throne Judgment.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Why did earth and sky flee from the presence of the Judge seated on the Great White Throne?

Jesus is the Judge seated on the Great White Throne. “He [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed [Christ]. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Jesus himself said, “The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father” (John 5:22–23).

The Great White Throne Judgment is neither on earth nor in heaven. At this scene of judgment it is said that “Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them” (Revelation 20:11). After the judgment, John sees “a new heaven and a new earth” and “the new Jerusalem” (Revelation 21:1–2). The destruction of the old earth and heavens comes at the end of Christ’s judgment of the wicked at the Great White Throne. Evil is absent from the new heaven and earth. Satan and his evil cohorts are permanently locked up in the lake of fire. The old heaven and earth, contaminated by evil, are gone, replaced by a new sin-free heaven and earth. From a different throne in the New Jerusalem, Christ says, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:5).

With Satan, Antichrist, the false prophet, and the fallen angels already in the burning lake of fire, the unbelieving dead from all past ages must be resurrected to stand before the Judge to receive their sentence: eternity in the lake of fire, without parole. The evidence cannot be disputed. If your name is not in the Book of Life, the sentence is the second death, eternal punishment. Some may try to say, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” (Matthew 7:22). But whether important or insignificant (both great and small), they all stand before the stern Judge. After a harsh reminder that the name is not in the book of life, the words are heard, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” (7:23). That should make every believer evaluate his or her motivation for supposedly doing the work of the Kingdom. The sad scene of the Great White Throne Judgment should make every believer ask, “Do you know me, Lord?”

As we conclude this study, we are left with an awesome two-fold commission. First, what God told Moses to say to the Israelites, He also says to us, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). The charge is repeated in 1 Peter 1:15–16: “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” Our study of Bible prophecy should underscore the importance of this divine command.

An early nineteenth century British poet, William Wordsworth, wrote a sonnet titled, “The World Is Too Much With Us.” He felt everyone needed to get back to a simpler life,

back to the basics. If there was reason for the message two hundred years ago, how much more must we guard the spiritual core of our lives in this age of technology and human conveniences? God’s call to us today is the same message He gave to the Israelites. He is still the same God from the beginning.

The second part of our commission is the Great Commission. “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). Horton (1991) describes the fate of the lost in a way that should motivate our outreach.

The Bible is careful to let us know that the final destiny of the lost is terrible beyond imagination. It will involve tribulation, anguish, weeping, and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 22:13; 25:30; Romans 2:9). It is a furnace of fire (Matthew 13:42, 50), causing eternal loss, or everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Its fires, by their very nature, will be unquenchable (Mark 9:43), and the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, so they will have no rest (Revelation 14:11; 20:10). No wonder the Bible says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). (304–305)

May God give you a passion for living a holy life, always pleasing to Him. May He give you a burden for your lost neighbors and acquaintances, as well as the lost around the world. God bless you richly!

Glossary

Chapter		
Abrahamic Covenant	— God’s promises to Abraham, including a promised people, a promised blessing, and a promised land.	4
allegorize	— to interpret details as symbolic rather than literal.	7
allegory	— a literary form that uses symbolic fictional characters and actions to emphasize general truth. Those who apply this method of interpreting prophecy look for a deeper “spiritual” meaning behind the actual descriptions.	1
amillennialism	— literally “no millennium.” Rather than a physical future reign of Christ on earth, this view spiritualizes the Millennium, identifying it as Christ’s reign in heaven throughout the present Church Age.	1

apocalypse	—	an unveiling or revealing of the future; Revelation is apocalyptic literature.	9
Armageddon	—	the final battle between Christ and Antichrist (Revelation 16:16); takes place at the end of the Tribulation when Christ returns to earth to defeat Satan and his followers (second advent or coming).	10
Davidic Covenant	—	God's promises to David, including an established house, kingdom, and throne forever.	4
Day of the Lord	—	the period of God's judgment on evil and wickedness, beginning after the Rapture and ending after the Great White Throne Judgment.	7
dispensationalism	—	a teaching that God's activity in history can be divided into seven dispensations or periods when God deals with humans according to a special standard.	11
divine attribute	—	a quality or characteristic of God, such as eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient; also moral attributes such as holy, just, love, and good.	2
dominion theology	—	the belief that the believer should have dominion over every area of human life because Christ provided that dominion through His death and resurrection.	11
eschatology	—	literally, "last things." The branch of theology that is concerned with end-time events, particularly life after death, Bible events yet in the future, and the final state of the redeemed and the unsaved.	1
evil triad	—	Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet.	8
futurist view of prophecy	—	unfulfilled biblical prophecies will literally be fulfilled in God's end-time activity.	7

Gog	— king of Magog who in latter days invades Israel from the north as recorded in Ezekiel 38 and 39.	10
Great White Throne Judgment	— judgment of the wicked (including the resurrected wicked dead) at the end of the Millennium.	3
hades	— the New Testament translation of the Hebrew Sheol, a place of torment and agony for the wicked.	3
historicist view of prophecy	— views biblical prophecy as having been gradually fulfilled throughout church history.	7
humanism	— a philosophy or way of life that values human achievements over submission to a supernatural God.	11
idealist view of prophecy	— views biblical prophecy as symbolic description of the continuing conflict between good and evil, with good ultimately winning.	7
inerrancy	— the assurance that the Bible is without error of any kind	1
intermediate state	— the condition of believers and non-believers between death and their resurrection.	3
kingdom now	— the belief that Christ's kingdom exists on earth now, so believers should operate in the authority given by Christ.	11
kingdom of God/Heaven	— God's reign over His creation; more specifically, God's reign and rule in the world, the church, the hearts of believers, and ultimately in the millennium and eternity.	12
literalist	— a person who believes Bible prophecy will take place literally as described in Scripture.	1
mid-Tribulation rapture	— Christ comes for the faithful during the Tribulation (many variations).	5

Mosaic Covenant	— God's covenant of the Old Testament law delivered through Moses at Mt. Sinai; Israel failed to keep the covenant.	4
New Covenant	— God's salvation covenant with Church Age believers; it supersedes the covenant of the law.	4
omnipotent	— all-powerful. God is omnipotent.	6
patriarchal cultures	— social customs that prevailed in the time of Old Testament ancestors of the Jewish people, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.	6
Pentateuch	— the first five books of the Old Testament, attributed to Moses.	7
postmillennialism	— the belief that the Millennium is actually the Church Age or period immediately following; a view that Christ reigns, but is not physically present during this period.	1
post-Tribulation rapture	— Christ comes for the Church after the Tribulation.	5
premillennialists	— those who teach that Jesus will physically return and establish His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years.	8
preterist view of prophecy	— views biblical prophecy as having already been fulfilled.	7
pre-Tribulation rapture	— Christ comes for the church prior to the Tribulation.	5
pre-wrath Rapture	— modified view of mid-Tribulation Rapture that places Rapture any time after middle of the seventh year on up to the Second Coming, if God's wrath is poured out quickly when it is unleashed on those left on earth.	5

purgatory	– the Afterlife place where, according to Roman Catholic teaching, the souls of the faithful are purified before entering heaven.	3
rapture	– literally “caught up” or “snatched up.” Christ’s sudden coming for His saints, bringing an end to the Church Age and ushering in the Tribulation.	1
reconstructionism	– the teaching that the church is called to change (reconstruct) society so it conforms to Old and New Testament mandates; its mission is more than spiritual transformation of individuals.	1 1
reincarnation	– the passing of a human soul at death into a new body, either human or animal.	3
revelation	– God’s act of disclosing himself and His will. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” is the full title of the last book of the Bible.	5
sanctification	– progressive sanctification (as opposed to instant sanctification at salvation) is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus in our Christian walk.	6
Second Advent	– another name for the Second Coming. “Advent” literally means arrival or coming. Jesus’ birth was the first advent.	5
Second Coming	– Christ’s return to earth at the end of the Tribulation to defeat Satan and his hosts. The First Coming was when Jesus came to earth as a baby.	5
sheol	– Old Testament Hebrew word for the place where the souls of the wicked go at death.	3
soul sleep	– false belief that when one dies the soul is in a state of stupor or goes completely out of existence. The teaching misinterprets Paul’s reference to sleep as a figure or image for physical death.	3

theocracy	— a government administered by God or His representative.	1 1
theonomists	— persons who believe society should be governed by God, or subject to God's authority.	1 1
Tribulation	— seven-year period of time between the Rapture and Christ's return to earth when God's wrath is poured out. The last 3½ years are sometimes called the Great Tribulation.	5
ultradispensationalists	— Dispensationalists who take extreme positions and find additional periods when God's deals differently with humankind.	1 1
universalism	— the belief that all humans, fallen angels, and even Satan will finally be saved and accept God's blessing and love.	