

Apocalypse Then: Future Events



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Forward

Do people care about the future?

One of the first questions children have when a loved one dies is, “Where did she go?” Perhaps we care more about the future when we’re young and when we’re old. Ludmila Maslove, age 34, from Moscow, Russia, in a poll seeking to determine how many people believed in heaven, said, *“I started to believe in heaven only as I got older and further from my Soviet upbringing. Now my belief helps me through tough times.”* Sometimes our motives for looking forward are a bit selfish. Mona Randem was admiring her aunt’s necklace when her aunt said, “I’m leaving it to you in my will.” She was overjoyed and responded, “Oh! I’m looking forward to that!”

Scientists tell us that our star, the sun, is going to burn too hot at some point, boiling our oceans and making life here impossible, and that future might fill us with dread, except that the target date for that burnout is another 1-2 billion years. But even sooner than that, “scientists predict that if we keep going along our current greenhouse gas emissions trajectory, climate change will cause more than a third of the Earth’s animal and plant species to face extinction by 2050 — and up to 70 percent by the end of the century. Such a catastrophic loss would irreversibly diminish biodiversity, severely disrupt ecosystems, and cause immense hardship for human societies worldwide.”¹

Many of us have a more immediate future focus, concerned about who our next president will be, or whether we will get married, or how much income we will make this year. But we don’t worry too greatly about much further out than that. Christians, on the other hand, have been told to think about the future and we actually have a game-plan for what that future will look like. Jesus told us the date for that future is unknown but that we should, nevertheless, “stay awake” (Matthew 24:36,42) in anticipation of it.

¹ [Global Warming and Life on Earth \(biologicaldiversity.org\)](http://biologicaldiversity.org)

How do we describe that future? Well, that is what this book is about. It is about both the more or less immediate future for anyone who dies, and the possibly more distant future of the events of the end of the world as we know it.

Thinking of the end of the world as we know it can spark a lot of fear. I have a precious nephew who as a youth was scared pretty badly by preaching he heard on this subject. And depending on who you are, there might be some things to be scared of. Believers need not fear, and we'll show why.

Back in 1979 the movie *Apocalypse Now*² hit the theaters and told the story of dark and dangerous end-of-the-world type goings on in Vietnam, playing on the meaning we have given to "apocalypse" of "an imminent cosmic cataclysm"³ of fiery proportions. But the Greek word from which we get apocalypse simply means revelation or unveiling. We will be unveiling things to come then, not now. We'll take that future look.

² [Apocalypse Now - Wikipedia](#)

³ [Apocalypse | Definition of Apocalypse by Merriam-Webster \(merriam-webster.com\)](#)

Chapter 1, God's Plan for Our Future

The future we had in store at the very beginning of our creation, in the garden with Adam and Eve, is certainly a matter of speculation, though we know it would not involve death and wars and famines and earthly disasters. Our parents were born in righteousness and destined for greatness, serving as God's co-regents on earth, ruling and subduing the earth with hearts of wisdom and grace, directing civilization with brilliance and creativity, and caring for life and earth as gifts of God with a great amount of treasuring. But something happened that altered that future dramatically and not for the good.

Adam and Eve were persuaded by the serpent to disobey God. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil believing that it would make them able to determine what is good and evil for themselves. They believed it would make them like God. They were ready to usurp God's place and rule themselves. But the only thing that resulted from their action was an immediate sense of vulnerability (they knew they were naked) and, when confronted by Yahweh in the garden, a fearful commitment to self-preservation.

Adam blamed Eve for his bad decision (and he really blamed God, also... "the woman YOU gave me, she made me eat"). Eve blamed the serpent. The serpent had no one to blame. Eve no longer felt safe in relationship with Adam (he threw her under the bus with God), and neither Adam nor Eve felt safe with the serpent. And God introduced a new reality for the couple...the reality of futility. The world is no longer going to work as it did before. Life is going to be a battle against pain and frustration. Childbirth, for example, will involve great pain. Agriculture will constantly battle unrelenting competition from weeds.

And there will be conflict, conflict with the serpent and his offspring. And in this conflict is the promise for the world. That seems strange, but God's plan for the earth is centered around this conflict with the serpent and his offspring. Genesis 3:15 is the hope for earth and the human race. God's words are directed to the serpent, but they are really a promise for us.

And 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.

The Continued Conflict, the Ultimate Conflict

The serpent is an enemy who has already succeeded in alienating Adam and Eve from God and spoiling God's perfect kingdom. Who is this serpent? Well, we're told he was the most "subtle" (King James

Version, “crafty” New International and English Standard Version, “cunning” New King James Version, “shrewdest” New Living Translation) of the beasts of the field (Genesis 3:1). That word in the Hebrew is used in a positive sense in Proverbs of the sensible or prudent person (Proverbs 12:16,23; 13:8,16; 14:15,18; 22:3; 27:12). But the shrewdness of the serpent seems more sinister, and we must understand that there is an evil presence inhabiting him. In Revelation 12:9 John identifies the dragon who will war against Michael the archangel just before the Great Tribulation, as that “ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world” (New Living Translation).

We know from the New Testament that Satan can enter into a person, that his demons can possess people and control them. It seems Satan entered into this beast, the serpent, who was already more shrewd or sensible than any of the other beasts of the field. Our first parents seemed to register no surprise at the serpent speaking to them. But it was the malevolent one in the serpent who tempted them. Yahweh directs His judgment against both, we would suggest, altering the beast’s status in the world (“on your belly you will crawl” and “eat” dust, 3:14), and engendering, or at least predicting, conflict between Satan, with his “offspring,” and those people who are subjects of Yahweh.

Yahweh describes an ultimate conflict between Satan and an offspring of the woman, one in which Satan will strike his heel but he will crush Satan’s head. This signals the final defeat of Satan, in which, to be sure, he is able to strike a serious blow to the woman’s offspring, but not a fatal one, contrary to what he himself receives. This defeat of the Serpent/Satan suggests that God’s kingdom is ultimately restored and victorious. The enemy who led to the defeat of God’s kingdom is finally vanquished by a human, Eve’s child. And so, the outlining of the consequences for the serpent actually becomes the promise of the return of God’s kingdom, achieved by someone from Adam and Eve’s race.

We might say this is the “big idea” of history. God is restoring His rule on earth through the very people who were defeated by the Serpent. We see it played out in see-saw fashion, Satan gaining victory at times in his bid to destroy the holy seed of God, and God’s people gaining at times. We see Satan’s victory in the slaying of Abel by Cain (who was “of that evil one,” 1 John 3:12), only to be matched by Eve’s having another child, Seth. We see it in Satan’s success in getting all people on earth to only do evil continually so that they are destroyed (Genesis 6:5), matched by Noah’s victorious faithful following of Yahweh and the rebooting of the human race after the flood through Noah and his children. We see it in Satan’s effectiveness at teaching idolatry to all the nations, but in God’s calling of one man, Abraham, to be a family and ultimately a nation that serves the true and living God, a nation that cradles the coming Messiah. We see it in Pharaoh’s decree to the midwives to expose and let die all the males born to Israelites, but the brilliant deception of the midwives to thwart Pharaoh’s plan and the saving of Moses, who later leads Israel out of Egypt. And of course, we see it in Satan’s efforts to get Jesus crucified (the crushing of the seed of the woman’s heel), but with Jesus’ resurrection crushing his head. There is a future see-saw we will see, when Satan empowers the antichrist and comes near to getting allegiance from all peoples, and Jesus returns to earth, defeats the antichrist, and imprisons Satan. And one more future see-saw is the release of Satan during the Millennium, who deceives the nations once again and marches on Jesus in Jerusalem, only to be defeated yet again and cast into the Lake of Fire, while Jesus’ kingdom enters its eternal phase.

The seed of the woman defeats the Serpent. There are iterations of the victorious seed of the woman (Abel, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, et al) and iterations of the seed of the Serpent (Cain, Lamech, Nimrod, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus Epiphanes, the Pharisees). But the ultimate seed of the woman is Jesus, and his ultimate nemesis is Satan.

Prophecy and the Promise

God's plan for us and our earth, therefore, is intrinsically tied to childbirth. The seed of the woman is going to be our salvation. Each child born could be a deliverer or even the deliverer. Bearing children is extraordinarily important, not just for the continuance of the human race, but for its rescue (1 Timothy 2:15?). And it is no accident that the key issue for many of Eve's daughters is inability to bear children. Having a child becomes a matter of divine intervention or enablement, and often a matter of prophecy.

God promises and predicts that Abraham and Sarah will have their own child who will continue the line of the promise (Genesis 18). Samson's parents are visited by the Angel of Yahweh to tell them that they will have a son who will deliver Israel (Judges 13). Isaiah has children by God's prediction who will be used for signs to a rebellious Israel (Isaiah 7-9). And, of course, Mary is visited by an angel to tell her of the child she will bear (Luke 1).

All the great prophecies of Scripture are related to this promise of the seed of the woman who will defeat the Serpent, whether they are near fulfillments or the ultimate fulfillment. The prophetic word anticipates the messiahs and the Messiah. In fact, we see a narrowing of the messianic line in prophetic utterances:

- Noah prophesies that his son Shem will have precedence over Ham and Japheth, that Yahweh will be his God (Genesis 9). This tells us that "the" (ultimate) seed of the woman will come through Shem's line.
- God chooses Abraham out of all the Shemites to make of him a nation that will bless all nations (Genesis 12). "The" seed of the woman will come through Abraham's lineage.
- God prophesies that it is Abraham's son Isaac, not Ishmael, who will continue the line of promise (Genesis 18), and Isaac's son Jacob, not Esau, likewise is selected (Genesis 25).
- Jacob prophesies that his son Judah, out of all twelve of his sons, will bear the king's scepter (Genesis 49). And so "the" ruler, "the" seed of the woman, will be from the tribe of Judah.
- The prophet Nathan tells David that he, of all Judah's descendants, will retain the throne forever through David's offspring (2 Samuel 7).
- And an angel announces to Mary that her son, miraculously conceived, will be the son of David who will be the ultimate seed of the woman, the Messiah, who will deliver his people (Luke 1).

That the ultimate seed is said to be the seed of the woman only, is an indication, of course, shrouded in mystery in Genesis 3:15, that God will do something miraculous, more miraculous than normal, in

Messiah's birth. We are not disappointed in this respect when we find that Mary conceives Jesus by the Holy Spirit rather than by a human male. This makes Jesus the seed only of a woman, fulfilling the strange wording of Genesis 3:15.

In that each of the preliminary messiahs or seeds of the woman are victors over the offspring of the Serpent, they serve as examples of the ultimate Messiah and even foreshadowings of Messiah, and therefore prophetic types of the Messiah. They are patterns or models for what Messiah will be. We may assume that every prophet understood this, so that, for example, when Hosea describes Israel, God's son, being called out of Egypt (Hosea 11), he could definitely see this applying to Messiah as well, since Israel, the nation, is a type of or pattern for the ultimate Messiah. Or when Isaiah's son, who will be called Immanuel (Isaiah 7), is meant as a sign to Judah's king, he could certainly also understand that the Messiah would be virgin-born and Immanuel, "God with us," in the ultimate sense. And Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the ideal righteous person (Psalm 34), Melchizedek, Levi, Aaron, and many other provisional messiahs will have their experiences relived, perhaps to an extreme level, by Jesus. [See Appendix 15: Types of Messianic Prophecy]

God's Plan for You and Me

In this overall plan of God for our world and our future there is a plan for us individually. The seed of the woman refers to all who walk in fellowship with God and who, therefore, wage war against the Serpent. The unique, ultimate seed of the woman, Jesus the Messiah, is the embodiment of all that humans were meant to be, completely surrendered to God's will, fully loving and fully righteous, wise and ready for any situation. And we are to become just like him.

Paul tells us,

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, even to those who are called according to His purpose. Because whom He foreknew, He also predestined to conformity to the image of His Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:28,29)

We are to be little 'm' messiahs, doing the works that Jesus did and even greater (John 14:12). We are to continue wrestling against the rulers and authorities and forces of darkness in the heavenlies (Ephesians 6:12). God is making true believers into Jesus-clones in this life and will complete the process with our death and then our resurrection, as we will see.

Chapter 2, The Day of Yahweh

When it is someone's birthday, we often sing to them, and may say to them, "This is your day." Well, God has a day, also. One of the most frequent notes played in the Old Testament is "the Day of Yahweh." And it is a note that is played both in major and minor key. And we should not be surprised that it can describe many partial fulfillments and an ultimate fulfillment, just like the conflict between the Seed of the woman and the Serpent. The Day of Yahweh is the time when Yahweh comes in judgment to bring justice to the earth.

Immediate Days of Yahweh

Isaiah 7 describes a more immediate Day of Yahweh, in which Judah, the southern of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, is guaranteed that her judgment will come in the form of Assyrian conquest. Ahaz, the king of Judah at the time of this prophetic word from Isaiah, has been terrified by the alliance of Israel, the northern Jewish kingdom, with Syria, an alliance that threatens Judah with war. Yahweh tells Ahaz through Isaiah that this alliance will come to nothing and offers him the sign that the son of the virgin will only be a few years old when this alliance collapses. But Ahaz allies himself with Assyria to strengthen his hand against Israel and Syria (2 Kings 16:5-9). Isaiah must tell him that it is Assyria who is his worst enemy, and who, in the days of Hezekiah, will come and threaten Jerusalem itself with destruction and defeat. Here is the prophecy:

¹⁷ [Yahweh] will bring on you, your people, and your father's house such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah: He will bring the king of Assyria."

¹⁸ On that day

*[Yahweh] will whistle to flies
at the farthest streams of the Nile
and to bees in the land of Assyria.*

*¹⁹ All of them will come and settle
in the steep ravines, in the clefts of the rocks,
in all the thornbushes, and in all the water holes.*

²⁰ On that day [Yahweh] will use a razor hired from beyond the Euphrates River—the king of Assyria—to shave the hair on your heads, the hair on your legs, and even your beards.

²¹ On that day

a man will raise a young cow and two sheep,

²² and from the abundant milk they give

he will eat curds,

for every survivor in the land will eat curds and honey.

²³ And on that day

every place where there were a thousand vines,

*worth a thousand pieces of silver,
will become thorns and briers.
24 A man will go there with bow and arrows
because the whole land will be thorns and briers.
25 You will not go to all the hills
that were once tilled with a hoe,
for fear of the thorns and briers.
Those hills will be places for oxen to graze
and for sheep to trample. (Isaiah 7:17-25, CSB)*

We can see that critical elements of the Day of Yahweh include a time of distress for God's people that comes from Yahweh's judgment, in this case flies from the Nile (the Egyptians) and bees and razor from beyond the Euphrates (the Assyrians), the two superpowers of their day meeting in battle in a trampled Judah. But even amid this promised judgment there is a positive promise that there will be survivors whose needs will be met by Yahweh. These are the minor and major keys of the Day of Yahweh. Because of God's covenant with Israel, He will never totally abandon them to destruction.

Jeremiah 12:3; 50:31; Lamentations 1:12; 2:1,22; Ezekiel 30; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Amos 4:2; 5:18-20; 8:11; Obadiah 1:8,15; and Haggai 2:23 all predict more immediate days of Yahweh in which God punishes His people but also restores the ones who are true believers, the remnant He always keeps to maintain the nation He has promised to make sovereign among all nations and mediator of His knowledge (Jeremiah 3:14-18; Zechariah 10-14).

The Ultimate Day of Yahweh

These two aspects of the Day of Yahweh, judgment and blessing, are anticipated in the ultimate Day of Yahweh, the final judgment, in which Yahweh Himself will come personally to carry out both the judgment and the deliverance/restoration. Several prophets speak of this final Day of Yahweh:

*28 After this
I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity;
then your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
your old men will have dreams,
and your young men will see visions.
29 I will even pour out my Spirit
on the male and female slaves in those days.
30 I will display wonders
in the heavens and on the earth:
blood, fire, and columns of smoke.
31 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the great and terrible day of [Yahweh] comes.
32 Then everyone who calls
on the name of [Yahweh] will be saved,
for there will be an escape*

*for those on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
as [Yahweh] promised,
among the survivors [Yahweh] calls. (Joel 2:28-32, CSB)*

It will be a "great and terrible" day, a day when the heavens are filled with "blood, fire and columns of smoke," a typical way of saying that the natural functions of earth will be interrupted by divine judgment. But for those who call on the name of Yahweh and are saved, there will be a way of escape from the judgment. They will be a remnant of survivors who maintain their identity as the nation of Israel.

*¹⁸ Woe to you who long for the day of [Yahweh]!
What will the day of [Yahweh] be for you?
It will be darkness and not light.
¹⁹ It will be like a man who flees from a lion
only to have a bear confront him.
He goes home and rests his hand against the wall
only to have a snake bite him.
²⁰ Won't the day of [Yahweh]
be darkness rather than light,
even gloom without any brightness in it?
²¹ I hate, I despise, your feasts!
I can't stand the stench
of your solemn assemblies.
²² Even if you offer me
your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
I will have no regard
for your fellowship offerings of fattened cattle.
²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
²⁴ But let justice flow like water,
and righteousness, like an unfailing stream. (Amos 5:18-24, CSB)*

Israel knows that this final Day of Yahweh will mean blessing for them, an elevation of their nation to primacy among all nations, the day when Yahweh finally makes them secure and prosperous and a leader to the nations. But Amos must warn them that it will begin with judgment. It will be a time of darkness and not light initially, because of their having the form of godliness but not the substance. It will be a judgment on their failure to show justice and righteousness, a judgment on their unfaithfulness to Yahweh (see 5:25,26).

Characteristics of the Day of Yahweh

The witness of the prophets to this Day of Yahweh show some startling, and initially, seemingly contradictory characteristics:

- It will be a time in which the arrogance of the wicked is brought low, and Yahweh is exalted (Isaiah 2:11,12,17; 28:5; 60:19,20).

- It will be a time in which the Branch of Yahweh is exalted (Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 9:9-10), preceded by Elijah (Malachi 4:5). This Branch is the ultimate Seed of the Woman, the Servant of Yahweh, so identified in Isaiah 49:8, the Messiah. This is the day on which Yahweh's feet will touch on the Mount of Olives, the place from which Jesus ascended and to which the angels said he would also return, and the mountain is split in two (Zechariah 14:4). Therefore, the Day of Yahweh is called, in the New Testament, the Day of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6,10; 2:16) or the Day of the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:14).
 - It will be a time in which the nations are gathered against Israel (Zechariah 12:1-9) to judge her, a time of destruction for Jerusalem (Isaiah 22:5-25; Jeremiah 7:32; 15:9; 19:6; Lamentations 1:12; 2:1,22; Ezekiel 7:1-19; 12:23-25; 13:5; Zechariah 14:2), but also a time in which Yahweh will lead the Israelites in battle (Zechariah 9:11-17; 14:14; Malachi 4:3). This seems contradictory until we realize that...
 - This will also be a time of Israel's national repentance (Zechariah 12:10-14) and healing (Isaiah 30:26; Zechariah 3:9; 13:1-2). It will be a time of purging her from idolatry.
 - And so it will be a time of abundance in the land (Isaiah 4:2; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11ff; Zechariah 3:10; 8:9-13,19; 14:1,14), an outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28ff), a time of protection (Isaiah 4:5; Zechariah 8:4-8; 14:3,10-11), and a time of favor and comfort to Israel (Isaiah 61:2; Jeremiah 23:6; Micah 4:1; Zechariah 8:4-8), a time of Israel's restoration as a nation (Jeremiah 5:18; 16:14; 30:3,8; 31:27-28,38; 38-39; Joel 3:1-3; Zechariah 14:2ff; Malachi 4:1f).
 - It will be a time in which the remnant of Israel return to the land, trusting Yahweh (Isaiah 10:20; 11:11; 27:12,13; Jeremiah 3:14,18), as well as when her former enemies come to Yahweh in faith and submit to Israel (Isaiah 19:16-21; Jeremiah 48:47; 49:39; Micah 4:1; Zechariah 2:11; 8:20-23; 14:16-19), because the knowledge of Yahweh has filled the earth (Jeremiah 3:15; 31:33; Joel 3:17)
 - It will be a time of vengeance against the nations initially (Isaiah 24:21; 34:8; 61:2; 63:1; Jeremiah 46:10; 47:4; 49:2; Joel 2:18-30; 3:1-3; 3:4,14,19-21; Obadiah 1:8,15; Zephaniah 3:8; 9:1-8; 14:12), but then also for Israel.
1. It will be a time of punishment for the host of heaven (Isaiah 24:21), Satan and his fallen angels (Revelation 12,19,20), for their own rebellion and their role in leading humans in rebellion. The Serpent and the seed of the Serpent will have their heads crushed (Genesis 3:15).
- It will be the time that Yahweh's throne is established in Jerusalem (Jesus' throne to be most exact, Jeremiah 3:17; Zechariah 8:1-3; 14:9; Revelation 20), a time in which the new temple is built (Ezekiel 40-44; Zechariah 14:20-21; Malachi 3:4) during the millennium (Revelation 20), to be followed by the new heaven and new earth being remade and the coming of the heavenly Jerusalem to earth, in which there will be no temple, but the Father and the Son are the temple (Jeremiah 3:16; Revelation 21)

The Setting Up of Two Ages

It is no surprise, then, that the anticipation of this ultimate Day of Yahweh leads Israel to think in terms of two ages that comprise all of history, the present age, in which Israel lives in anticipation of the fulfillment of Yahweh's promises, and the age to come, inaugurated by the Day of Yahweh, in which all Yahweh's promises are fulfilled.

Chapter 3, Between Two Ages

If you were desirous of going to college, hopeful that a college degree would enable you to get a great job, a career for life, and yet, you could not afford college, you might feel hopeless. But if a benefactor promised to pay for your college, you could, based on that promise, enroll and begin living in hope. Each semester, as your benefactor paid your tuition and expenses, you would be experiencing a partial fulfillment of his promise to you. The final payment and your graduation would be the consummation of the promise and entrance into the new reality for which you had hoped.

From the time in which you moved from hopelessness to hope, because of your benefactor's promise, until the complete fulfillment of that promise, you would have been delivered from the hopeless situation in which you lived and experiencing with anticipation the blessings of the promised fulfillment. You would have been living between the two eras of your life, hopelessness and hope fulfilled. You would still be in your non-graduated-from-college state, but you would also be enjoying some of the benefits of the state to come in anticipation of your graduation.

That is what living between the coming of Jesus the first time and his second coming is like.

This Age and the Age to Come

The history of the earth may be divided into two parts:

1) The present (evil) age

This is the time before the seed of the woman comes and defeats the serpent and restores God's kingdom. It is the time when the conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman rages, with many defeats and victories on both sides. The curse on earth is unabated, with the frustration and futility of life a dominating factor, and with death ruling.

2) The age to come

This is when the seed of the woman comes and establishes God's kingdom on earth once again by removing all enemies and making His people perfect. Death is vanquished, the curse is removed, and the Serpent is defeated. This happens in two stages, the millennial kingdom, and the eternal kingdom.



We see this designation of two ages throughout the New Testament. Jesus speaks of it often:

- Matthew 12:32, *Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in **this age** or in **the one to come**.*
- Matthew 13:22,38-39, *Now the one sown among the thorns—this is one who hears the word, but the worries of **this age** and the seduction of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom.... The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is **the end of the age**, and the reapers are angels. (see Mark 4:19)*
- Mark 10:30, *who will not receive 100 times more, now at **this time**—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and eternal life in **the age to come**.*
- Luke 16:8, *The master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted astutely. For the sons of **this age** are more astute than the sons of light in dealing with their own people.*
- Luke 20:34–35, *And Jesus said to them, “The sons of **this age** marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to **that age** and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage....*
- Matthew 28:20, *“...teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to **the end of the age**.”*

The disciples of Jesus used this designation:

- Matthew 24:3, *While He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached Him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what is the sign of Your coming and of **the end of the age**?”*

The apostles and other New Testament authors used the dual designation:

- Romans 12:2, *Do not be conformed to **this age**, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.*
- 1 Corinthians 1:20, *Where is the philosopher? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of **this age**? Hasn't God made the world's wisdom foolish?*
- 1 Corinthians 2:6, *However, we do speak a wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of **this age**, or of the rulers of **this age**, who are coming to nothing.*
- 1 Corinthians 10:11, *Now these things happened to them as examples, and they were written as a warning to us, on whom **the ends of the ages** have come.*
- 2 Corinthians 4:4, *In their case, the god of **this age** has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*
- Galatians 1:4, *who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from **this present evil age**, according to the will of our God and Father.*

- Ephesians 1:21, *far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in **this age** but also in **the one to come**.*
- 1 Timothy 6:17, *Instruct those who are rich in **the present age** not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy.*
- 1 Timothy 6:19, *storing up for themselves a good reserve for **the age to come**, so that they may take hold of life that is real.*
- Hebrews 6:5, *tasted God's good word and the powers of **the coming age**,*
- Hebrews 9:26, *Otherwise, He would have had to suffer many times since the foundation of the world. But now He has appeared one time, at the **end of the ages**, for the removal of sin by the sacrifice of Himself.*

The Strange Thing About These Ages

Even within this present age there is a part of it that is called the “**end of the ages**” (Hebrews 9:26), the “**last days**” (Isaiah 2:2; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1; Acts 2:17; 2 Timothy 3:1; Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3), and those [last, later, terrible] “**times**” [of the Gentiles, of trouble, of refreshing, of fulfillment] (Daniel 9:25; 11:14; 12:1,7; Matthew 16:3; Luke 21:24; Acts 1:7; 3:19; Ephesians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:1; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; 1 Peter 1:20; Jude 18; Revelation 12:14). Like the last year of a president’s term of office, or the final hours before the sale ends, or the final months of life insurance coverage, there is a segment of the present age that is its time of nearness to termination. And there are certain characteristics of this end of times that are different from all the previous years of this age.

As several Scriptures remark, the end of the age is marked by the coming of the Messiah to remove sin by his sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26). This means the fulfillment of the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the Serpent is “near” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:15; 13:29; Luke 10:11; 21:8,20,28,31; Romans 13:11,12; James 5:8; 1 Peter 4:7; Revelation 1:3; 22:10). There is a nearness of the end of this present evil age, created by the fact that there is now nothing needing to be done before Yahweh comes in His final day of visitation, the time of Jesus’ return to earth to establish his kingdom.

There is a nearness such that the powers of the age to come are seeping into this age. Hebrews 6:5 can describe the miracles we see as belonging to the coming age. The Messiah has indeed come, but he has left to come again later for the final conclusion of his labors. His followers are empowered by his Spirit to do God’s will, a taste of what the kingdom will be like. We speak the wisdom of the age to come now, in this present age (1 Corinthians 2:6-8). We are experiencing the New Covenant blessings of forgiveness and a new heart now (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8) before the covenant is fully inaugurated with Israel. And the world, in its passing away, is manifesting the increased influence of the Serpent (1 John 2:15-18). As John says, “This is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

So, though we are living in this present evil age, as Paul calls it, we have been “rescued” from it (Galatians 1:4).

- We have been delivered from this present evil age (Galatians 1:4)

1. Christ's atonement has provided forgiveness for our sin
 2. The Holy Spirit has begun breaking our grip on all the things we used to cling to for life: false philosophies, money, power, pleasure, and evil spirits who promote love for the world (Colossians 2:6-10)
 3. We are made citizens of the kingdom yet to come (Philippians 3:20)
 4. We are experiencing the power of the kingdom in limited ways now (Hebrews 6:5)
- Every victory we experience, either personally or as a group, is a part of wounding the serpent's head and a bit of the kingdom gaining ground in the present age. In this sense, the present age is passing away (1 John 2:17).
 - We are still of the present age, however, in that we will experience death, and illness, and the effects of broken relationships. The end of these sufferings awaits the age to come, and we are promised a place in that form of the kingdom.

Believers are a community of new agers, not in the popular sense of that term, but in the sense that we are sharing in the age to come through our connection to the King, Jesus Christ.

- We are awarded kingdom prizes in incipient form: *Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29–30, ESV)*
- We escape conformity to this age by minds renewed to follow the will of God: *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2, ESV) and ...training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. (Titus 2:12, ESV)*
- We learn and speak the wisdom of the age to come: *Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (1 Corinthians 2:6–7, ESV)*
- The blinding by the Serpent has been removed and we now see the glories of the kingdom: *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4, ESV)*
- We are under the rule of the coming King: *...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave*

him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:19–23, ESV)

- We are making investment deposits in the coming age by our works of love now: *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.* (1 Timothy 6:17–19, ESV)
- We are being weaned from love for this age to find life in the age to come: *For Demas has deserted me because he has loved this present age.* (2 Timothy 4:10)
- We are performing miracles, the miracles of the kingdom, in the power of that age: *...and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,* (Hebrews 6:5, ESV)

How to Wait

Have you tasted the powers of the age to come as you live in this present evil age? Do you find yourself being weaned from love for this age, investing instead in the age to come, being conformed to the will of God and His coming kingdom by the renewal of your mind? Are you being rewarded now with family-like relationships with fellow believers? This is how you should be waiting.

Jesus instructed us, before he finished this phase of his work by dying on a cross, to “keep watch” (Matthew 24:42; 25:13) so that we would be ready when he unexpectedly came (Matthew 24:44). But that waiting and watching is not a passive one. He uses a parable of the bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13) being ready for the bridegroom to come, not by simply sitting there doing nothing, but by accomplishing what they need to accomplish (purchase of oil for lamps). He uses the parable of the faithful servants (Matthew 24:45-51; 25:14-30) who are to work to make their capital funds multiply in value.

Waiting is not a sit-down activity. Waiting is actively praying for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Waiting is stepping through open doors of service and reclaiming territory taken by the Serpent. Waiting is believing for mountains to be removed and cast into the sea. Waiting is pursuing our heavenly calling by being renewed in our minds according to the standards of the age to come.

What to Look For

Jesus did not leave us without some signs to look for when his coming is near. He deals with these in his explanation to his disciples in Matthew 24. Jesus thinks of the coming of the Day of Yahweh initially as a coming birth. This age to come is new life. But as with any birth there are first birth pangs that signal the nearness of the birth itself.

EARLY LABOR, MATTHEW 24:4-8

⁴ Jesus answered them, "Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. ⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled. For all these things must happen, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, epidemics, and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of sorrows. (Modern English Version)

The early signs include:

- Many false Messiahs
- Rumors of war and actual wars among nations
- Famines and earthquakes

But Jesus warns us that these are not really the end yet.

ACTIVE LABOR, MATTHEW 24:9-14

⁹ "Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. And you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. ¹⁰ Then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will rise and will deceive many. ¹² Because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But he who endures to the end shall be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Modern English Version)

The key signs here are:

- Widespread persecution and hatred by all nations
- Turning away from the faith by many believed to be Christians, deceived by false prophets who are effectively leading people away from the faith
- A world without love

It is interesting at this point that Jesus mentions that the gospel will be preached in all the world before the end comes. That has been going on now for many centuries, but it seems that there might be a splurge of preaching carried out by the 144,000 Jewish believers mentioned in Revelation 7, which occurs in this next stage.

TRANSITIONAL ADVANCED LABOR, MATTHEW 24:15-24

¹⁵ "So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ Let him who is in the field not return to take his clothes. ¹⁹ Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your escape will not be in the winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then will be great tribulation, such as has not happened since the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be.

²² “Unless those days were shortened, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. ²³ Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ Listen, I have told you beforehand. (Modern English Version)

Jesus makes clear that the most critical sign to come will be “the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel” (Matthew 24:15). This is the desolation or desecration of the sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem predicted in Daniel 9:27. This desecration is accomplished by the antichrist who sits in the temple proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

Jesus calls this time a time of “great distress” (NIV) or “tribulation” (KJV) that the world has never experienced before, and which will be unequalled in its devastation. It will be the time of outpouring of God’s judgments on the earth, described more fully in Revelation 6-19, the seal judgments, trumpet judgments, and bowl judgments. And unless the days had been “cut short,” Jesus says, no one would survive. And at this time there will be even a greater proliferation of false messiahs and prophets, somehow able to perform signs and wonders.

Jesus has pointed us to Daniel the prophet for a detailing of this time period, so we look next at Daniel’s timetable.

Chapter 4, Daniel's Timetable of Events - Daniel 9:20-27

Daniel is a unique prophet in the history of prophets in Israel. His recognition as a prophet comes with the interpretation of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2), an unusual way to be called to this role. And his prophetic ministry is, in large part, to non-Jews, to the people of power in the kingdoms of Babylon and Medo-Persia. And because of this, most likely, his prophecies are about the sweeping sagas of future kingdoms and their displacement by the kingdom of God.

The Occasion for Daniel's Prophecy

Daniel, as was his habit, was in prayer to Yahweh. And he was particularly in prayer about the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that Israel's captivity, in which Daniel was personally participating, would last 70 years, and that 70 years was nearly up. So Daniel is concerned and prays (Daniel 9:1-19).

He confesses the sins of his people against God, their violating of God's covenant requirements, His commands and laws, their failing to listen to God's prophets whom He sent to warn His people. He acknowledges his people's shame at having been exiled from their country due to God's judgment and admits that this very judgment was predicted by Moses in the law and clearly foretold. But he knows the mercy and forgiveness of God and appeals to the honor of God's name to look with favor upon His temple and forgive His people who bear His name.

And it is during this very prayer that God chooses to send the angel Gabriel to Daniel, to give him an answer, to be sure, but to give him an answer much beyond what he was asking for. Gabriel shows Daniel the whole future history of Israel.

The Seventy Sevens

Daniel relates it this way:

²⁰ While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill— ²¹ while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening

sacrifice. ²² He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. ²³ As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision:

²⁴ "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. (Daniel 9:20-24, NIV)

It is interesting that this angel flies (from heaven, we may presume) and that he comes during the evening sacrifice (about 3pm and the time for evening prayer), a sacrifice that cannot actually be offered because it must be offered at the temple and that temple lies in ruins. Though the Israelites are not doing sacrifice, they keep this timetable. We are told that Jesus gave up his spirit on the cross at this same time 483 years later (Matthew 27:46 Mark 15:34 Luke 23:44).

"Seventy 'sevens'," Gabriel declares, are decreed for the people of Israel and for Jerusalem to accomplish several very important matters:

- (1) to finish transgression, put an end to sin, atone for wickedness
- (2) to bring in everlasting righteousness
- (3) to seal up vision and prophecy and
- (4) to anoint the most holy place (or most holy one)

What are these 'sevens'? Are they days? 490 days would occur in about a year and a half. Did any or all of these matters happen that soon? No. Are they months? 490 months would only be about 9 years, and none of these things happened within that time frame. What about years? 483 years would take us to what we now know as the 1st century AD (anno domini, the year of our Lord) or CE (Christian era), and as we'll see, to exactly 33 CE, the year in which we believe Jesus was crucified. Was wickedness atoned for then? By all means! Was everlasting righteousness brought in then? No! But we will see that there seems to be a gap set between the 483rd year and the remaining 7 years.

Gap Theory

Gabriel continues:

²⁵ "Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. ²⁶ After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. ²⁷ He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the

temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. (Daniel 9:25-27, NIV)

Gabriel sets the beginning marker for this remarkable timetable as the time when the decree goes out to “restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” There are four possible decrees that might be considered here:

- Cyrus** (538 BC) - decree to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4)
- Darius I** (520 BC) – a restatement of Cyrus’ decree after a challenge by Israel’s enemies (Ezra 6:1-12)
- Artaxerxes Longimanus** (457 BC) - decree to provide for sacrifices at the temple (Ezra 7:11-26)
- Artaxerxes Longimanus** (444 BC) - decree to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-8)

It is only this last decree that fulfills the requirements of Gabriel’s words. And what is really intriguing is that Gabriel says that from the time this decree goes out until the Anointed One comes, there will be “seven ‘sevens’ and sixty-two ‘sevens,’” or, in other words, 69 sevens or 483 years, seven years shy of the 490 years predicted. And he says the city will be rebuilt in times of trouble, which the book of Nehemiah accurately attests to. But after the “sixty-two ‘sevens’” have been accomplished, Gabriel says, the Anointed One will be put to death. The sixty-two sevens follow the seven ‘sevens’, so we are looking at 483 years from this decree until the cutting off or death of Messiah (that’s what “anointed one” translates to).

J. Dwight Pentecost, in his commentary on this passage, includes a chart showing the computation of these 483 years⁴:

The 483 Years in the Jewish and Gregorian Calendars

Jewish Calendar (360 days per year*)

$$(7 \times 7) + (62 \times 7) \text{ years} = 483 \text{ years}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 483 \text{ years} \\ \times 360 \text{ days} \\ \hline 173,880 \text{ days} \end{array}$$

Gregorian Calendar (365 days a year)

$$444 \text{ B.C. to A.D. 33} = 476 \text{ years}^\ddagger$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 476 \text{ years} \\ \times 365 \text{ days} \\ \hline 173,740 \text{ days} \\ + 116 \text{ days in leap years}^\ddagger \\ + 24 \text{ days (March 5–March 30)} \\ \hline 173,880 \text{ days} \end{array}$$

*See comments on Daniel 9:27b for confirmation of this 360-day year.

†Since only one year expired between 1 B.C. and A.D. 1, the total is 476, not 477.

‡A total of 476 years divided by four (a leap year every four years) gives 119 additional days. But three days must be subtracted from 119 because centennial years are not leap years, though every 400th year is a leap year.

⁴ P.1363, J. Dwight Pentecost, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament, 1984.

Jewish years are lunar years, so they contain 360 days rather than our solar calendars' 365 days with leap year days, so the calculation takes that into account, as well as the decree coming out on March 5, 444 BCE, and Christ's death on Passover in 33 CE taking place on March 30. The 483 years in terms of days, then, is 173,880 days, which perfectly matches the calendar event of Jesus' crucifixion.

So there is a marker for the first 483 years, the death of the Messiah. Then there is a description of events after this:

²⁶ After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. ²⁷ He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

There is a people of the ruler who will come. These people will destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple in it. Then, the ruler will make a covenant (with the people of Israel, we assume) for seven years. But three and a half years into the covenant he will violate the covenant and desecrate the sanctuary, thus putting an end to sacrificing. He will do this until the end decreed for him is "poured out" (he is judged).

This covenant time is our last seven years, our seventieth 'seven'. Has this last event happened? Yes and no. Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and ascended in 33 CE. Thirty-seven years later, in 70 CE, the Romans invaded Jerusalem and destroyed it and its temple. So if this is the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, there was a gap between the first sixty-nine 'sevens' and the last or seventieth 'seven'. There were 483 years completed, then a 37-year gap, then.... Well, there was no clear seven-year period that ended with what the prophecy depicted, "to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place." There was no seven-year covenant made, broken halfway through.

Was the prophecy mistaken? Of course not. Given that there is a gap between the 69th 'seven' and the 70th 'seven', it makes sense that the last 'seven' has not yet occurred. The destruction of Jerusalem and her temple in 70 CE is a partial fulfillment, but the ultimate fulfillment is yet to come. **This means that Jerusalem will have to be rebuilt and the temple as well, for a future desecration and end to sacrifice.**

Of course, it is extraordinary that Israel's nation has been restored to her homeland in 1948, with great conflict, we might add. Visitors to the city will see the place where the temple stood, bereft of a temple, occupied instead with a shrine and a mosque. The shrine to Muhammed built over the dome of the rock sits likely exactly where the temple did, and to the side on the same temple mount sits the mosque. It is a holy place in Islam. It seems impossible that Israel could rebuild the temple there without a great conflagration ignited. Perhaps this is what the evil ruler will be able to achieve with his covenant, the freedom for Israel to build the temple there. Only he will then desecrate the rebuilt temple. And this

act, according to Jesus (Matthew 24) sets off the time of great distress or tribulation, three and a half years of divine retribution and human vying for power. This is described in Revelation 6-19.

Summary of Events from Daniel 9

So, to summarize what Daniel was told by Gabriel in this extraordinary prophecy:

- In 483 years from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (March 444 BCE), the Messiah will come but be killed (33 CE).
- Jerusalem and her temple will be destroyed by the people of the ruler to come.
- The final seven years of 70 'sevens' will begin with that ruler making a covenant with Israel for seven years that allows her to rebuild the temple and reinstitute sacrifice.
- The ruler will break the covenant three and a half years into the seven years of agreement and desecrate the sanctuary by setting up something abominable in it.
- The ruler will be finally judged by God.

This ruler may safely be identified with the antichrist (1 John 2:18-22; 4:3; 2 John 7), the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4), and the beast who comes out of the sea (Revelation 13,17-19). His great fame will be brokering a deal to let Israel reclaim the temple mount for building its temple. His great infamy will be desecrating that rebuilt temple, perhaps with an image of himself to be worshiped and with himself dwelling there to receive worship.

Daniel's clock is still ticking.

Chapter 5, Your Personal Eschatology

If Daniel's clock does not run out before you die, what can you expect? What happens to a human being when he or she dies? What is our future on a personal basis? Eschatology, or last events, for us individually begins with death.

Personal Eschatology for the Nonbeliever

Death is spoken of in Scripture in three ways: (1) physical death (which James describes as the soul leaving the body, James 2:26), (2) spiritual death, the separation of the person from God (Ephesians 2:1-3), and (3) eternal death, separation from God forever (Revelation 20:11-15, what John calls the "second death"). The one who believes in Jesus has been rescued from spiritual and eternal death, has crossed, Jesus says, from death to life (John 5:24). Consequently, the believer will not experience eternal death when he or she dies physically, but rather eternal life (John 17:2,3). This is not the case for the nonbeliever.

When the nonbeliever dies physically, when his soul separates from his body, because he is spiritually dead (separated spiritually from God), he is sentenced to eternal death, eternal separation from God. Jesus told his disciples,

"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, NIV).

Jesus describes the fate of the nonbeliever in Luke 16:19-31,

*"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. **The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this***

flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’” (ESV, emphasis mine)

Though the King James translation calls the place where the rich man is in torment “hell,” the Greek term is “hades.” The term “hell” should be reserved to translate the Aramaic term Jesus uses for the final place of the nonbelieving dead, *Gehenna* (Mt. 13:42,50; 23:15,33; 25:41,46; Lk. 12:5). Hades seems to be the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol*, the term used in the Old Testament for the grave but also conceived of as the place in the earth where the souls of the dead reside.

Genesis 37:35 gives Jacob’s description of *sheol*,

All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, “No, I shall go down to Sheol [KJV, “the grave”] to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him.

And that could, conceivably, only indicate that *sheol* means the grave, the physical place where the body is buried. But when Isaiah describes the fate of the king of Babylon and his coming death, he says this in Isaiah 14:9,

Sheol [KJV, “hell”] beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come; it rouses the shades [departed souls] to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations.

Here we see a picture of *sheol* that has conscious “shades” or spirits of dead people, dead kings in this instance, who get up off their thrones to greet the new resident, the departed spirit of the king of Babylon. It does not say that they are in torment, as it does of the rich man in Jesus’ depiction, but it does not exclude that idea, either.

What do we make of the rich man’s torment? He asks for Lazarus to dip his finger in water and put a drop on his tongue, as if both he and Lazarus have bodies. But we know that the dead are “shades” or souls, separated from their bodies (James 2:26). When the witch or medium of Endor is asked by king Saul to consult a “spirit” for him, the spirit of Samuel, the departed prophet, it is a “ghostly figure” (NIV, literally “gods,” *olim*) that comes “up” from *sheol*, indicating that *sheol*, or hades, is beneath in the earth. Samuel is not happy that Saul has “brought him up” because it is evidence that Saul is not looking

to Yahweh for knowledge and direction. Samuel has all his faculties; he just doesn't have a body through which those faculties are expressed. The medium can perceive him, but Saul cannot.

But the rich man acts as if he has a body which is being burned and is thirsty. This cannot be. Perhaps he sees Lazarus and Abraham as if they have bodies, and himself as well, but there is no "fuel" of flesh and bone that is being burned. May we suppose that the "fire" is psychological, rather than physical? Is there a burning-like experience psychologically when one is truly cut off from God?

Perhaps we're not meant to take Jesus' description as literal. Perhaps this is simply a parable. However, it is unlike Jesus to use a proper name in a parable. And even if it was a parable, it would not be likely that what it describes is not meant to be what really is.

But this is not the final place of punishment for the nonbeliever. This is what has been termed the intermediate state. Revelation 20:11-15 shows us a future disposition, the final state, of the unbelieving dead:

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, **Death and Hades gave up the dead** who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*
(ESV, emphasis mine)

At the end of the millennium, Jesus' thousand-year reign on earth from Jerusalem (Revelation 20:1-10), Satan is judged and thrown into the Lake of Fire, and now the "dead" are also brought before Jesus' tribunal, a great white throne, and judged by two standards:

- They are judged by what is written in the "books," a collection or account of all the things they have done. This strongly suggests that there are varying degrees of punishment in the Lake of Fire, as Dante believed and sought to describe in his work *Inferno*, and as Jesus explicitly teaches when he says,

²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it

will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.” (Matthew 11:21-24, NIV)

- They are also judged by the absence of their names from the Book of Life. If they have not believed in Jesus, they are not listed in the Book of Life. Of course, that was already known, as were their works, but here at the final judgment the case is made against them and explains why they deserve the Lake of Fire, the final place of torment.

Personal Eschatology for the Believer

The story is very different for the follower of Jesus Christ. As we have seen from Jesus’ description of the rich man and Lazarus, death for the believer means the abiding of the spirit or soul in Paradise. “Paradise” (Luke 23:43) is one way that Jesus described the destination of believers, the other way being “Abraham’s side” or “bosom,” the term Jesus used of Lazarus in Luke 16.

The Good Part of Hades

Before the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the destination of believers at death was *sheol* (Old Testament, *hades*, New Testament, 1 Sam. 28:7-15; Job 17:13-16; Ac. 2:27-31; Lk. 16:23,26; 23:29-43), and Luke 16 shows us that there are two compartments in *sheol* or Hades, one for unbelievers and one for believers, and there is no travel between them. Once you are at your destination, torment or comfort, you’re there for good. Even Jesus’ spirit went to *sheol* or Hades, the Paradise section, when he died on the cross. He told the thief who believed, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The Apostles’ Creed, which mentions Jesus descending into hell, is most likely a description of his descending into Hades, where, at that time, Paradise was located.

But after Jesus’ ascension the destination of Paradise was apparently moved. Paul mentions Paradise being in the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). The third heaven, by its description, can only be Heaven, where God dwells. And this fits with what Paul and others tell us elsewhere about where believers go now when they die.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. (Philippians 1:21–24, ESV)

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. (2 Corinthians 5:6–9, ESV)

And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Acts 7:56–59, ESV)

It is clear that when a believer dies, he or she goes immediately into the presence of Christ. We may also assume that all believers who had died prior to Christ's coming, were transferred to the new location of Paradise, also. There is also an indication that when our souls make heaven, they are perfected in holiness. Two passages give us this hint:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22–24, ESV)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:1–3, ESV)

The author of Hebrews is urging Jewish believers to remain firm in their faith in Christ, holding out to them the motivation that their citizenship is in the heavenly Jerusalem, where innumerable angels gather and where the assembly of the firstborn is enrolled. This is heaven, and it is here that the spirits of the righteous, believers who have died, are made perfect, which in Hebrews means their sin has been atoned for and removed. John tells us that to see Jesus is to become like him.

Resurrection for the Kingdom

But heaven is only the first stage of the believer's trek toward Christlikeness. There is still the matter of our bodies. We're not done with bodily existence. Paul explains our situation as body/soul creatures:

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:1–4, ESV)

Paul says we are not made to be bodiless. It is as if we are naked when we die and our souls go to heaven. But Paul knows that we have a body coming, one not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. It is the resurrection body. Even while we're living, we are groaning for the true garment for our souls, that perfect body that is like Christ's body. Paul says we will get that body when Jesus comes back, and he describes it this way:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, ESV)

When Jesus returns to set up his kingdom on earth, he will bring the souls of those who have died ("fallen asleep" Paul says, because our bodies' deaths are temporary) with him, to join them to their resurrected bodies. They will be resurrected first. Then the believers who are still alive when Jesus comes will be resurrected without having to die first. Their bodies and souls will be perfected at the same time.

Paul describes what that perfection of resurrection will be like in two key passages:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.... But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.... So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:20–23, 35–38, 42–44, ESV)

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Philippians 3:20–21, ESV)

There are naturally questions about how our actual bodies could be recovered. What about those who died at sea and whose bodies were eaten by ocean creatures? Their DNA is all over the ocean. Or those

who were burned to ashes. There is no DNA left. Or just the simple process of decay that leaves only bones and even those eventually disintegrate. But God is able to do all things. The body may perish like a sown seed, but God can make it sprout an entirely new thing.

Chapter 6: Where No Man Has Gone Before (Alternative Views of the Soul's Destiny)

Should we believe in hell? That is, an eternal, unending torment for unbelievers? It certainly doesn't seem to some like something a loving God would subject nonbelievers to, no matter how evil they were. In fact, leading evangelicals have come out against the traditional view of eternal hell, some holding to a hell in which residents are rehabilitated and come to faith in Christ, some holding to the complete annihilation of the nonbeliever's soul at death. Still others, not evangelicals we should suppose, believe that human souls are constantly reincarnated at death, migrating from body to body until, normally, they are perfected and acquire heaven.

The Traditional View of Hell as Eternal Torment

The word most commonly translated "hell" in the New Testament is *geenan* for the place-name Gehenna, a ravine or valley named for the son of Hinnom (*ge-ben-hinnom*, Jeremiah 7:31,32), running east-west to the south of Jerusalem, a place where two wicked kings of Judah burned their children alive as a sacrifice to Molech (2 Chronicles, 28:3; 33:6). King Josiah desecrated this unholy place (2 Kings 23:10) perhaps by making this place a garbage dump, and it is possible that there was a constant fire burning there with the garbage as fuel. It thus became a term for hell, the place of torment for the wicked.

Jesus spoke frequently of hell:

Matthew 5:22 - But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

Matthew 5:29,30 - If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Matthew 10:28 - *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Matthew 23:15 - *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.*

Matthew 23:33 - *You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?*

Jesus uses the concept of the worm not dying and the fire not being quenched (“hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’” Mark 9:47,48), picking up the language of Isaiah 66:24. And this concept of hell seems to indicate that it is a place where the punishment does not end, that hell is an eternal place of punishment.

This eternal nature of hell seems to be confirmed by Jesus’ description of the judgment that occurs when Jesus returns, what we sometimes call the “sheep and goat” judgment, because Jesus describes those who are nonbelievers as goats and the saved as sheep.⁵

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the

⁵ This is not the same as the Revelation 20 “Great White Throne” judgment, which takes place at the end of the millennium.

least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31–46, ESV)

The basis for Christ’s judgment of all the nations is how they responded to his disciples, which, in essence means, how they responded to the gospel. So it is an individual judgment, as various individuals within various nations would have responded to Jesus’ disciples in different ways. But critical to our understanding of what hell means is Jesus’ description of it as “eternal punishment.” This stands in parallel to “eternal life.” The word “eternal” (*aionios*) is used as an adjective for both. Life for the sheep is just as eternal as is punishment for the goats. This is the same word used of God (Romans 16:26) and the spirit of Christ (Hebrews 9:14).

2 Thessalonians 1:9 also adds to this picture, where Paul says, “They will suffer justice, eternal destruction, from the face of the Lord and from His glorious might.” Does eternal destruction mean non-existence forever? The term translated “destruction” is the Greek *olethros*, which can mean destruction, ruin, or death, in New Testament era literature.⁶ If the sense of “ruin” is the focus, this could describe continuous ruination, rather than out-and-out destruction.

This view is consistent with the biblical view of the intermediate state of the nonbeliever. Jesus pictures the state of the soul between death and the final judgment in his story of Lazarus and the rich man:

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:19–31, ESV)

⁶ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 2nd edition, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker, 1979

Chris Loewen at rethinkinghell.com⁷ suggests that Jesus' story comports with other stories of ancient cultures designed to teach morality by showing the fate of the dead who were unjust. Context tells us that Jesus' intent is to convict the Pharisees of their failure to be concerned with the poor but, unlike most morality tales about the fate of the dead, the twist in Jesus' parable is that no one can go back or should go back and tell people about hell, since they have the Law and Prophets to teach them. Hence, this parable is not meant, he says, to teach anything about hell itself.

But it is hard to imagine that Jesus' intent is for his listeners to conclude that how he describes the state of Lazarus and the rich man is not to be taken seriously. There is no value to the story if there is no validity to the threat of torment and promise of comfort.

And in this state of the soul at death there is torment for the nonbeliever. The place of torment is Hades, synonymous with *sheol* in the Old Testament. At the last judgment, mentioned in Revelation 20, Hades gives up its dead, who have been suffering in torment, and they are judged according to their works and according to the absence of their names in the book of life, and they are then consigned to the Lake of Fire, which is properly called hell. The nature of the intermediate state is consistent with the nature of the eternal state for the nonbeliever, though the intermediate state has an end.

Annihilation of the Soul

Here is the introduction to rethinkinghell.com:

Rethinking Hell represents a global network of Christian scholars, pastors, and laypeople who have been rethinking the idea of Hell as eternal torment, in favor of a biblical alternative known as Conditional Immortality. We believe that the saved in Christ will receive the reward of immortality, while others will finally be destroyed (sometimes referred to as annihilation).⁸

Annihilationists point to several passages that suggest the penalty for unbelief is complete destruction:

Matthew 10:28 - And do not fear because of those who kill the body but they are not able to kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

John 3:16 - Because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 - They will suffer justice, eternal destruction, from the face of the Lord and from His glorious might.

⁷ <http://rethinkinghell.com/2017/05/16/hypocrisy-not-hell-the-polemic-parable-of-lazarus-and-the-rich-man/>

⁸ [Rethinking Hell | Exploring Evangelical Conditionalism \(Annihilationism\)](http://rethinkinghell.com/), <http://rethinkinghell.com/>

They also argue that passages traditionally understood as teaching eternal torment are poorly interpreted. For example, Revelation 19:20; 20:10-15,

And the beast was captured and the false prophet with him who performed signs before him, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.... And the Devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet also were, and they were tormented day and night forever and ever. And I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it, from whose face earth and heaven fled and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. And books were opened, and another book was opened, the book of life, and the dead were judged from what was written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged each according to their works. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Conditionalists/Annihilationists point out that the beast may not be a literal individual person, and certainly death and Hades are not individuals, and to say that these are thrown into hell and tormented forever does not make sense of impersonal things. This must signal, they argue, that “eternal torment” must mean something other than conscious, non-ending suffering in hell. It should be interpreted consistently with the other passages that describe the penalty of the lost as destruction, that is, annihilation. Revelation 17:11, for example, says that the fate of the beast is that it “goes to destruction.” They argue that we shouldn’t conform the meaning of “destruction” to “eternal conscious torment” but rather the other way around. If it is destruction, it cannot be eternally continuing.

They argue that fire, the common description of God’s judgment, destroys. Those passages in which Jesus speaks of hell as the place where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mark 9:48) describe complete destruction, as eventually the worms eat all the body and fire burns the body up. The “eternal destruction from the face of the Lord” does not mean eternally being destroyed away from God’s presence, but total destruction coming from the face of the Lord.

Some potential weaknesses in the conditionalist case, however, are their dependence on identifying the beast as an entity rather than a person and viewing death and Hades as entities rather than a metonymy of container for contents (another way of describing the unbelieving dead people). If all of these represent real individuals, there is no reason to understand “eternal torment” as untenable. And how are we to think of the beast and the false prophet being destroyed a thousand years before the Devil if they are not personal entities? They are said to have they been in the lake of fire for a thousand years before the Devil, in that torment where they were thrown “alive”?

The most effective argument for the annihilationist view is that the word *aionios*, often translated ‘eternal’ in most translations of the New Testament, does not in all instances literally mean ‘eternal’.

And this is unequivocally true. It is an adjectival form of *aion*, or 'age', and so might be woodenly translated 'pertaining to the age'. In Matthew 25:46 we might read, "These will go into pertaining to the age punishment, but the righteous into pertaining to the age life." The 'pertaining to the age punishment' would not be a time reference as much as an age to come reference, its length of time being a non-factor, but to the punishment appropriate to the age. The 'pertaining to the age life' would be the life of the age to come, the kingdom arrived, the time not being specified, though, as we might suppose, a life non-ending. It is decidedly harder to use this kind of description than to say "eternal", but "eternal" doesn't really get at the meaning of the word *aionios*.

The Greek word *aionios* is often used to translate the Hebrew word *olam* in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. And we see here even more clearly that "eternal" is not the meaning of the word *olam* nor *aionios* in several places:

Proverbs 22:28, Don't remove the ancient landmarks (don't remove the *olam* or *aionios* landmarks, not eternal landmarks at all)

Jeremiah 6:16, Stand in the way and look for the old (*olam/aionios*) paths (not eternal paths)

Isaiah 58:12, Your ancient (*olam/aionios*) ruins shall be rebuilt (not Jerusalem's eternal ruins)

In these instances, the age referred to is a past age, but certainly not an eternal one.

We may conclude, then, that if the punishment for the unbeliever is destruction, in the normal sense of this word, that would not be a continuing, forever torment, but the appropriate punishment for that age, the cessation of the unbeliever's soul. There are several church fathers who have held this view, Irenaeus, Arnobius and Athanasius being the most prominent.⁹

But if we accept the view that there is an intermediate state of the soul of the unbeliever in Hades that is then resolved by all Hades giving up the dead for the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20, it seems inconsistent to hold the annihilationist view. Why would the souls of the lost not be annihilated immediately at death? Why would they be in a place of torment, as the rich man experienced (Luke 16), for now at least 2,000 years (and many others much longer than that), only to be resurrected at the final judgment and cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20)? Why would annihilation take place then? It seems more consistent to hold that the experience of the intermediate state would only be continued in the final state.

Universal Reconciliation

The Church is being more honest than ever about their **desire** for Christian Universalism to be true. While they affirm what they believe Scripture to say about an eternal hell they are not

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annihilationism#:~:text=The%20belief%20in%20Annihilationism%20has%20appeared%20throughout%20Christian,but%20it%20has%20often%20been%20in%20the%20minority.https://www.afterlife.co.nz/articles/history-of-hell/>

holding back from saying that it troubles them greatly and that they “wish it were not true.”
(christianuniversalism.com)¹⁰

This statement at ChristianUniversalism.com is actually one of their arguments for the view that hell is remedial, curative, restoring, indeed, saving, rather than punitive (eternal punishment) or destructive (annihilation). The suggestions of this statement are (1) that the church for 2,000 years has not been honest about desiring all people to be saved, an assertion that cannot be certainly defended, and (2) that this desire for eternal hell not to be true is evidence that an eternal hell is not something consistent with who God is.

Because there is no Scripture that specifically states that hell will result in the conversion and redemption of unbelievers put there, the defense of this view is theological. They ask,

Will it mean that God’s justice requires sin to be punished forever in “eternal conscious torment” or that God’s justice will require that all be made righteous? Is Biblical justice getting even or is it something being made right? Does God *get* His justice or does He *do* His justice?¹¹

And they answer:

...if [it] is true, that justice and righteousness are in fact the same word, then we can be sure that doing justice will not only bring consequences to bear upon the evil doer but will restore a right-useness to both the victim and the perpetrator of injustice! This is the justice that every believer can invest in for there are no dead-ends ultimately. Everything will be restored. His word will not have returned void and our work will never ultimately have been in vain. We can’t be indifferent when we know that God loves His creation, intends to make all things new and has decreed it will be done. This is motivating and empowering!

If God’s righteousness/justice is restorative and not merely punitive or punishing, then we have justification for thinking of hell as a means of redeeming humans. Can this view of God’s justice be substantiated? Can the torment of hell be effective in bringing unbelievers to faith and repentance?

GOD’S JUSTICE

It might seem that God’s justice as expressed to Israel is restorative. Isaiah 1:21-26 suggests it:

²¹ See how the faithful city has become a prostitute! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to lodge in her—but now murderers! ²² Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. ²³ Your princes are rebels, partners with thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow’s case does not

¹⁰ <https://www.christianuniversalism.com/about-us/>

¹¹ <https://www.christianuniversalism.com/2012/03/righteousness-justice/>

come before them. ²⁴ Therefore the Lord, the Yahweh Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: “I will vent my wrath on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. ²⁶ I will restore your judges as at the first, your rulers as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.”

But is it justice that is restorative or does restoration come because God has an eternal covenant with Israel? And to be fair, the justice meted out to Israel was not restorative to those were slain by the invading Babylonians, or those who were carried into exile in Babylon and died before Israel was allowed to return to their land. It was the succeeding generation of surviving Israelites who repented and came back to the worship of Yahweh who were restored.

We can see the nature of God’s justice more clearly in Jeremiah’s prophecy against the destructive Israelite shepherds or leaders of Israel:

^{23:1} “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. ² Therefore this is what the Yahweh, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord... ¹⁵ Therefore this is what the Yahweh Almighty says concerning the prophets: “I will make them eat bitter food and drink poisoned water, because from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land.”... ²⁰ The anger of the Yahweh will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand it clearly... ³⁸ Although you claim, ‘This is a message from the Yahweh,’ this is what the Yahweh says: You used the words, ‘This is a message from the Lord,’ even though I told you that you must not claim, ‘This is a message from the Yahweh.’ ³⁹ Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your ancestors. ⁴⁰ I will bring on you everlasting disgrace—everlasting shame that will not be forgotten.”

Yahweh’s justice does not restore the wicked shepherds of Israel, but brings on them everlasting disgrace. God’s justice is fully accomplished by the full measure of Israel’s punishment, not by her restoration. His choice to restore the nation is not a function of His justice, but of His covenant with Israel.

Ezekiel’s prophecy shares much the same perspective:

^{22:13} “I will surely strike my hands together at the unjust gain you have made and at the blood you have shed in your midst. ¹⁴ Will your courage endure or your hands be strong in the day I deal with you? I Yahweh have spoken, and I will do it. ¹⁵ I will disperse you among the nations and scatter you through the countries; and I will put an end to your uncleanness. ¹⁶ When you have been defiled in the eyes of the nations, you will know that I am Yahweh.” ... ²⁹ The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the foreigner, denying them justice. ³⁰ “I looked for someone among them who would

build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one.³¹ So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign Yahweh.”

Yahweh’s promise of restoration is not mentioned here but His justice is expressed in the pouring out of His wrath until the offenders in Israel are consumed.

Micah 3:8, “*But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Yahweh, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin,*” indicates that the end or goal of God’s justice, expressed through the prophet Micah, is not restoration but rather the declaration of Israel’s sin.

CAN HELL REDEEM SOMEONE?

But let’s suppose that God’s purpose for Hell is to redeem those who, during their lifetime, refused to submit to Him or trust in Him, but instead lived their lives as if they were God. How does Hell redeem them? Does the pain motivate them to repent of their rebellion and believe in the Lord? We may recall that in Jesus’ description of Hades where Lazarus was comforted but the rich man was tormented, the rich man did seem to express some form of repentance:

And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:24-31, ESV)

The rich man’s concern for his brothers is commendable and shows some repentance, but Abraham does not give him hope that he can be redeemed because of this. In fact, he has just told him that no one can pass from where he is, in torment, to where Lazarus is, being comforted. “None may cross.”

And are we to suppose that at the Great White Throne judgment in Revelation 20, that when Death and Hades give up the dead to be judged, there are some who were there originally but who were moved to repentance and were redeemed and are now in heaven, but the rest have somehow after thousands of years still not repented and been rescued from Hades and are now being put into the Lake of Fire for further punishment until they repent and are rescued? There is just no indication in Scripture that this is the function of Hell, or God’s plan to redeem all human beings.

Reincarnation

Reincarnation is

“also known as rebirth or transmigration, the philosophical or religious belief that the non-physical essence of a living being begins a new life in a different physical form or body after biological death.... In most beliefs involving reincarnation, the soul is seen as immortal and the only thing that becomes perishable is the body. Upon death, the soul becomes transmigrated into a new infant (or animal) to live again. The term transmigration means the passing of a soul from another body to another after-death.”¹²

Though the concept has some variations in different religious and philosophical versions, “The reincarnation concept is considered in Indian religions as a step that starts each ‘cycle of aimless drifting, wandering or mundane existence,’ but one that is an opportunity to seek spiritual liberation through ethical living and a variety of meditative, yogic (*marga*), or other spiritual practices. They consider the release from the cycle of reincarnations as the ultimate spiritual goal, and call the liberation achieved by various terms such as *moksha*, *nirvana*, *mukti* and *kaivalya*.”¹³

Hebrews 9:27 seems to put the kibosh on this view, since, as it says, “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” In addition to this, the Scriptures always depict humans’ souls as either going immediately to heaven or hades/hell. Scripture also mitigates against this view in its rejection of works as a means of salvation. People can’t find “spiritual liberation” by “ethical living.”

Other problems with this view are moral and philosophical:

- A passive fatalism can be generated by this view, since all my life is determined by how I lived in the previous life. Those born into abject poverty, for example, are only living what they deserve, what they earned based on their previous life.
- Suffering is viewed as punishment for past, previous-life failures.
- It blurs the distinction between human and animal souls, since someone may reincarnate as an animal or insect or even a lower life form.
- It greatly complicates the problem of evil. Where did evil come from? Don’t we need moral failure in order to account for lower life forms, forms that make life for humans possible? Is it ever then really conceivable that everyone could eventually progress to the highest form and exit the transmigration chain? Why bother to live if I have already messed up in life (unless suicide is a further sin that will put me even lower on the food chain)?

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reincarnation>

¹³ *ibid*

Chapter 7: The Origins of the Kingdom

When God put Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, He appointed Adam and Eve as co-regents over it, commanding them to "rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth" (Genesis 1:26). This is the language of kingdom, God ruling over His world through human rulers. And what a kingdom it was! There was no deviation from God's love, goodness, rightness, or truth. Every creature of His was in sync with Him, and life in the kingdom was perfect.

GOD'S ORIGINAL PLAN

God's plan was not static, but rather, as Genesis 1:28 indicates, dynamic: *God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."* The kingdom was to expand and grow in influence and domain, until all the earth was filled and thriving with His greatest creations, humans at the helm.

But all that changed when Adam and Eve decided they wanted to be like God, determining for themselves what was good and evil (Genesis 3:1-7). Adam and Eve were no longer in submission to the King of the world. Something in them was altered with their disobedience to God's commands, and they found themselves very easy to self-centeredness, distrust of others, and readiness to harm even the ones they loved.

God wisely injected futility into His once perfect and satisfying world (Romans 8:20,21). Nothing would work as it was originally intended to do. The glorious experience of childbirth would be attended with pain. The raising of crops to provide food would be attended with competing growth that tried to choke out the good stuff. God's perfect world would not function perfectly anymore so that no one would be tempted to find all their life and meaning in the world, rather than in God.

And God laid a new plan. He would restore the kingdom to His own sovereignty, humans back to trusting obedience and the submission that led to thriving, and He would do it, He promised, through a

human individual born of the woman, Eve, who would defeat the serpent who was responsible for leading humans into rebellion:

I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

These words were spoken to the serpent, the culprit in tempting Adam and Eve to rebel. The peace that existed between them before would be no longer. Hostility would be the norm between the serpent's offspring, those who agreed with Satan, who was the influence behind the serpent, and those who were the seed of the woman, those who submitted themselves to God's rule. And one offspring or seed of the woman in particular would bring a lethal blow to the head of the serpent, to Satan, while enduring a non-lethal blow to his own heel.

This did not happen right away. God was playing the long game for bringing mankind back into the fold of the kingdom.

Initially, the seed of the serpent, ungodly nonbelievers, became the predominant influence in the world, so much so that God saw that *"human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time"* (Genesis 6:5, NIV). Only one man and his family were the exception, Noah and his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth (Genesis 6:8-10). God brought a flood on the earth that destroyed all human life and land-based animal life, except for Noah and his family who were spared with representatives of those animal species in a huge floating ark (Genesis 7-8).

God started over with Noah and his family and the animals they rescued, giving them the same mandate as He gave to Adam and Eve, with a few emendations:

¹ "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. ² The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority. ³ Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything. ⁴ However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it. ⁵ And I will require a penalty for your lifeblood; I will require it from any animal and from any human; if someone murders a fellow human, I will require that person's life.

⁶ Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed, for God made humans in his image.

⁷ But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it." (Genesis 9:1-7, NIV)

Two major provisions were (1) a deterrent to exploitation of the new food source, animals, by putting the fear of humans in them, making it more difficult to capture or kill them, and (2) a deterrent to taking human life, the death penalty for murder carried out by other humans. And He made a promise that the

seed of the woman, who would one day defeat the Serpent, would come through Noah's son Shem (Genesis 9:20-27).

MANKIND'S SUBSTITUTE KINGDOMS

People did not shy away from creating their own kingdoms, from Cain's city to Babel. Babel was the prototype of all future kingdoms. Her stated goal was to build themselves a city and a tower, to make for themselves a name so they wouldn't have to be scattered over the earth as God had commanded them to. They sought security in their numbers and a place to defend and a focus for worship. Only the confusion of their tongues by God moved them to continue scattering (Genesis 11:1-9).

But subsequent language groups (nations) kept working to develop secure kingdoms, like the Egyptians, the Hittites, the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Medes, Greeks, and Romans. And security wasn't just found in maintaining safe borders but in expanding and conquering other peoples. Oppression, aggression, destruction, and arrogance became hallmarks of human kingdoms (Isaiah 14).

The last days will be an exhibition of kingdoms in conflict (Matthew 24:7), with the kingdom alliance of the Beast overcoming the economic juggernaut of Babylon (Revelation 17,18). The amassing of wealth and the intoxication of national idolatries will be exposed as insufficient substitutes for the rule of the Living God.

GOD'S REFINED KINGDOM PLAN

Of course, Yahweh knew how mankind would seek to avoid His rule, and how Satan would seek to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:3), so He decided to build the kingdom through one family. It was the mustard seed approach Jesus talked about in his parables (Matthew 13:31,32). The family of Abraham was selected by God to be those who submitted to His rule, provide the child who would be king in God's kingdom, and invite others to become citizens of God's kingdom. They became a nation with a designated territory, with a law given them by God for the guidance of their nation, and a covenant relationship with the Creator of the universe.

However, they failed to keep covenant with Yahweh, worshiping other gods and disobeying God's law, so that they were exiled from their land for a time (the northern kingdom Israel in 722 BCE and the southern kingdom Judah in 586 BCE). God restored them to the land when they repented, and the child of promise, the seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent, came through Israel's lineage (Mary) at the proper time. But as a nation, they failed to receive him as their Messiah. They were once again exiled from their land (70 CE) and the followers of Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles, now constitute God's visible expression of His kingdom on earth. God is not done with Israel, and they will yet recognize Jesus as their Messiah, but in the meantime they are "enemies" of the good news of the kingdom and the Church is the aggregate of kingdom believers.

When Jesus returns there will be a wholesale turning of Israel to the Lord Jesus and Christ will set up his kingdom on earth, ruling from Jerusalem for one thousand years before handing the kingdom over to

the Father, where it will be located on a remade earth and the heavenly Jerusalem will come down from heaven to rest upon the new earth forever.

THE PROMISED LAND

When God called Abram to leave his family and go to a land God would direct him to, He told Abram,

“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:2–3 ESV)

When Yahweh confirmed His covenant with Abram by a vision of Him passing between the sacrificed animals Abram had split in two and arranged in a row, He told Abram,

“To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.” (Genesis 15:18–21 ESV)

And so the land has become the focus of the developing kingdom. We can trace the development of the kingdom by tracing Israel’s relationship to the land.

Stage one: Abraham dwells as a nomad in the land (Genesis)

Abraham trusts in the promise that he will one day possess the land (Genesis 13:14-18; 15:1-21; 17:8). In fact, when he and Lot separate because of the conflict between the two about where to pasture their herds, Abraham trusts God enough to give Lot the choice of where he wants to go, and not surprisingly, Lot chooses the best of the land. But God affirms to Abraham that it will all be his one day. And so, when Abraham’s wife Sarah dies, he has to purchase a piece of land to bury her. And Yahweh even tells Abraham that at some point his family will be enslaved in another land for 400 years before they return to this land again (Genesis 15:13-16).

Stage two: Israel resides in Egypt 400 years before returning to the promised land to displace its inhabitants (the accounts found in Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua)

At the end of Genesis, when Joseph brings his family to Egypt to reside, they are not slaves. But in time new Egyptian leadership, in fear of the hugely multiplied numbers of Israelites and their ability to join Egypt’s enemies and overthrow the Egyptian kingdom, oppresses and enslaves them. But God has been waiting until the “sin of the Amorites is full” (Genesis 15:16), waiting for the time when the Canaanites’ sin will have reached full measure, and God is ready to judge them. He will use the Israelites to do that judgment. So He shows His kingdom power through Moses and plagues Egypt until Egypt allows Israel to leave. He provides for Israel as they travel through the wilderness to Canaan, only to find Israel unwilling and untrusting in Him to conquer Canaan. Yahweh refuses to let the generation who disobeyed Him enter the land, letting them roam the desert until they die off and then using the next generation to go in and defeat the Canaanites.

Stage three: Israel refuses to have Yahweh as king and demands a human king, but ultimately is exiled for her sin (Judges, Samuel, Chronicles and Kings)

Israel's lack of faith in God's kingly power leads to failure to conquer all the Canaanites and to spiritual and moral defeat. Their lack of faith moves them to desire a human king to rule them. God uses this to create an appetite for the ultimate king, the Messiah. Under David's and Solomon's reigns Israel acquires control of all the land Yahweh promised Abraham. But subsequent kings who do not trust Yahweh, and the people's fall into idolatry, leads to reduced control of the land and eventually expulsion from the land by God in judgment.

Stage four: Israel returns to the land but remains under Gentile domination until her destruction in 70 CE (Daniel, Zechariah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi, Matthew)

Conquered by Babylon, and with many of her citizens exiled to Babylonian lands, Israel learns repentance from her idolatry. Medo-Persia conquers Babylon and allows Israelites to return to their land, under Medo-Persian dominion, of course. Greece conquers Persia and gains control of Israel as well. Rome conquers Greece and becomes the new ruler of Israel. Jesus the Messiah comes, but the nation rejects him. They rebel against Rome and Rome destroys Jerusalem and Israel flees the land.

Stage five: Israel regains the land, but not under God's rule, and then Messiah comes to rule. Daniel and Zechariah predict Israel's being in the land, and we have seen Israelites back in the land in our recent history, since 1948, yet in unbelief. Daniel and Zechariah also predict Gentile nations marching on Jerusalem to conquer it, and Messiah's return to defeat the enemies. Jesus sets up his kingdom with Jerusalem as his capital and rules one thousand years.

Stage six: The earth is remade and the heavenly Jerusalem descends to earth where Christ hands over the kingdom to the Father and the eternal state of the kingdom begins (Revelation)

This is the kingdom Jesus announces and teaches with his coming.

Chapter 8: Jesus and the Kingdom

Jesus came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). This was similar to the message John the Baptist was preaching, except that the one preaching it, in this case, was the King himself. He was the one John was preparing the way for, the one for whom the road was being smoothed, the hilly places leveled, and the crooked parts straightened (Luke 3:1-6). He is Yahweh who was promised to come (Isaiah 40:3).

The Present and Future Kingdom

So did the kingdom come in the person of Jesus, the King? Or is it coming in the future? May I suggest that the answer to both these questions is, "Yes"? In his sermon preached on the mount, a sermon that he no doubt preached on several occasions but the most complete form of which is recorded in Matthew 5-7, Jesus teaches both of these aspects of the kingdom, the present aspect and the future one.

It is the coming of the king that has kicked off the end of the age, the present age that is, and signaled the age to come, that it is near. The preaching of Jesus and John the Baptist both is that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. John's and Jesus' baptizing is to prepare people for the kingdom. At their baptism Israelites are repenting of their failure to live in submission to the King and His kingdom and acknowledging their belief in His power to deal with and forgive their sins.

But not all Israel is embracing the kingdom and its King, Jesus. As Peter even preaches to Israel after Jesus' death and resurrection, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus" (Acts 3:19,20). This could have happened for Israel if they had received Jesus as their Messiah, but as a nation, they did not.

This initial rejection by Israel of her Messiah results in a delay in the coming of the kingdom, the time of refreshing. The king has come, so in one sense the kingdom has also, but its full arrival will not occur until the king, Jesus, returns once more. In the meantime, Jesus' followers must live as kingdom citizens, obeying their Lord, proclaiming His kingdom, and praying for its full arrival (Matthew 6:9-13).

The Present Kingdom

Jesus begins his sermon on the mount with a stirring description of the character of those who belong to the kingdom, those to whom the kingdom belongs, in a sense.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:2–12, ESV)

"Owning" the kingdom ("*theirs is the kingdom of heaven*") is equivalent to inheriting the earth, being comforted, being satisfied, seeing God, and being called the sons of God. These are kingdom blessings that belong to those who see themselves as needy, mourning their sinfulness, hungering for a righteousness that they know they cannot produce themselves, and who are therefore merciful and understanding of others who sin, have hearts pure and free from arrogance and wickedness, are seeking to help others find the peace they have found, and are even holding fast to Jesus despite attacks from others against their loyalty to Jesus. Their reward will be great in heaven, which seems to suggest that though they own the kingdom, and the kingdom owns them, they are not yet in the kingdom. They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world who must influence those who do not own the kingdom to glorify the Father along with them (Matthew 5:13-16).

Jesus then, in his message (5:17-20), must correct a misconception that might be derived from his opening comments, the misconception that he has come to abolish the law (something that some Jews in Jesus' day believed was going to be true of the Messiah¹⁴). His remarks about those who qualify for the kingdom does not stress law keeping, but rather repentance and faith in Jesus, even in persecution. He emphasizes recognition of one's inability to keep the law and one's dependence on God to make one righteous. This is the opposite of confidence in one's own ability to keep the Law. And this teaching might lead one to think that Jesus is wanting to abolish the Law. As someone has put it rather poetically, Jesus is saying, "Ye who tremble at the word of the Lord, fear not that I am going to sweep the foundation from under your feet: Ye restless and revolutionary spirits, hope not that I am going to head any revolutionary movement: And ye who hypocritically affect great reverence for the law and the prophets, pretend not to find anything in My teaching derogatory to God's living oracles."¹⁵

¹⁴ Meyer's New Testament Commentary, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/5-17.htm>

¹⁵ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/5-17.htm>

Yet who but God has the power to abolish the law? Jesus speaks as one superior to Moses, as one who can abolish the law, but who asserts that he has not come to do that. The law and prophets (the whole Old Testament) must be fulfilled and accomplished, and one's righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees or else one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20). Only those who recognize that they cannot keep the law on their own, who submit themselves to follow Jesus, can keep the requirements of the law. The self-righteousness of the Pharisees mars and spoils their commandment-keeping, and keeps them from kingdom entrance.

Jesus proceeds to now interpret the law, as only the Lawgiver can, and describes the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees. It is a righteousness of the heart, not just the behavior, unlike what the Pharisees, who have depended on their great teachers, have taught. Desiring to kill someone in your anger is a failure to keep the proscription against murder. Keeping this command requires reconciling with those you are angry with (Matthew 5:21-26). It is not enough to refrain from murder. You must love your enemies (see verse 44).

Obedying the proscription against adultery requires not desiring an adulterous relationship and not divorcing one's spouse to engage in another marriage (Matthew 5:27-32). Obeying the law about lying requires being honest without recourse to making oaths or vows (5:33-37). The law to love your neighbors as yourself must take precedence over claiming your rights to justice or avenging a personal slight, loving even your enemies as God loves the unjust (5:38-48).

The righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees means not doing your righteous acts (prayer, fasting, giving) for anyone's praise but the Father's. Your prayer is for the kingdom to come, because it is not yet here, though the King is. And because the kingdom is not yet here with its Eden-like perfection, we must still depend on God for our daily needs, not worrying, but trusting in God's loving provision of our needs. It means seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:1-33).

The righteousness of the kingdom, that which exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, engages in self-critique before it criticizes others (7:1-5), finds energy for righteousness in persistent prayer (7:7-11), and lives by the Golden Rule (7:12).

We may summarize Jesus' teaching about kingdom living in this sermon as acknowledgment of one's spiritual poverty, a hunger for God's righteousness, a willingness to endure persecution and still love those who hate you, a devotion to the heart of God's law, obedience for God's not one's own sake, trust in God not ourselves, self-judgment before other-judgment, a heart that seeks after God, and a life that bears fruit, all in anticipation of the coming kingdom.

From this sermon and others Jesus preached, we see that life as a kingdom member has a spiritual requirement, repentance (Matthew 4:17) and faith (John 3:1-15). Repentance and faith results in being born again, born by the Spirit, and thus a possessor of eternal life. This recognition of one's failure to live up to the kingdom, and then trust in the king's ability to make you righteous, is that crisis moment in which you are born again. It is the primary spiritual requirement.

We have seen the moral requirements for kingdom living as outlined in Jesus' sermon on the mount. But there is also a surprising ethnic factor to the kingdom introduced by Jesus. Though Jesus sends his disciples to preach the kingdom to the house of Israel only (Matthew 10:15-17), he announces another flock he is going to incorporate into his sheepfold, the Gentiles (John 10:14-16). The kingdom will be like the temple, a house of prayer for all the nations (Mark 11:15-17). Though, as Jesus says, the kingdom is entirely based in the message of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17), it nevertheless will find a way to include all peoples. How could God's kingdom not be for all mankind?

But there is an evaluative prospect in the kingdom. It won't be every human who participates in the kingdom. Some will be excluded from the kingdom. If you stumble on account of Jesus (Matthew 11:6), if you do not repent and believe, you will not see the kingdom of God (John 3). But for those who follow Jesus and live in and by his power, there will be great reward (Matthew 19:28-30; 24:26-31; chapter 25).

The Future Kingdom

Jesus teaches most clearly about the future kingdom in Matthew 24 and 25. His teaching is in response to his disciples' questions about the kingdom,

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:1-3)

Their questions are in response to Jesus' certainty that the temple is going to be destroyed, something clearly not in line with the kingdom being manifest at the present time. Such destruction could only come because Israel is under judgment from God, and, of course, Jesus has told his disciples that he is going to be killed. This present evil age has certainly not ended yet, so they are now looking to Jesus coming again to end the age.

Jesus' answer is that there must be many terrifying and destructive events preceding his return. As we have seen, he uses the metaphor of giving birth, the birth pains, as a necessary prelude to the birth, a prelude to his coming with the kingdom.

Early labor signs include the coming of many false Messiahs, rumors of war and wars among the nations, and multiplied famines and earthquakes (Matthew 24:4-8). Active labor brings widespread persecution of Jesus' followers, hatred by all nations, a consequent turning away from the faith by many thought to be Christians, deception by false prophets who are effectively leading people away from the faith, and cold self-protection instead of warm love (Matthew 24:9-14). The transitional painful labor sign will be the "abomination that causes desolation," that is, the desecration of the temple, much like that 200

years earlier when Antiochus Epiphanes slaughtered a pig on the altar and set up a statue to Zeus.¹⁶ Another desecration must take place before Jesus returns to end the age. This is the same signal Daniel gives in the vision shown him of the end times (see chapter 4 above). This desecration will mark the beginning of what Jesus calls a time of great “distress” or “tribulation” unlike the world has ever seen, and which will only be alleviated by Jesus’ return (Matthew 24:15-24).

Then Jesus tells his disciples,

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:29–31, ESV)

The sign of the Son of Man is Jesus’ glorious appearance coming in the clouds, as Daniel 7 predicted, visible to entire world. Earth will mourn because this will be the final outpouring of judgment on earth, with a collecting of Jesus’ elect ones, his chosen ones, for blessing and reward, and condemnation for those who have stayed in rebellion. This is the Day of Yahweh.

Whereas Jesus has given these signs (Matthew 24:32-35), he cautions his disciples that the timing of when all this occurs, the timing of his return, is a secret (Matthew 24:36-51), and so his followers must stay alert and live as current kingdom citizens in anticipation of his coming. He follows this with two parables of waiting and being prepared for his coming (Matthew 25:1-30). Then he describes the judgment he will conduct as king (Matthew 25:31-46). This is what ends the present age and kicks off the age to come. When earth is rid of those who have opposed God and His kingdom, and only those who have submitted to His rule are left, the earthly kingdom begins, the age to come has indeed come.

Are you ready?

EXCURSUS: JUDGMENTS OF THE ESCHATON

There are three judgments of cosmic scale for humans:

1. Immediate, personal judgment upon death. Hebrews 9:27 says, "people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." For the unbeliever the judgment results in assignment to Hades (Luke 16:19-31), a place of torment, and for the believer Paradise (Luke 23:43). Paul mentions, also, that at the believer’s judgment, when we appear before “the judgment seat of Christ,” we will "receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). As Paul teaches is the case for teachers, this will be a time of reward or loss of reward, but not loss of salvation (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

¹⁶ <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-israel/antiochus-epiphanes-the-bibles-most-notoriously-forgotten-villain/>

2. Sheep and Goat judgment. Matthew 25 shows the judgment that takes place globally at the end of this present age, when Jesus returns to set up his kingdom on earth. The sheep are believers, who have demonstrated this by their loving response to Jesus' persecuted ones, whereas the goats are unbelievers who have demonstrated just the opposite. Unbelievers will be consigned to hell, whereas believers will enter the kingdom and eternal life.
3. The Great White Throne judgment. Revelation 20 describes the judgment of all the unbelieving dead that will occur at the end of the millennial kingdom, when all will be put in the Lake of Fire as their final destination. Various levels of punishment will be assigned them based on their works in this life.

Chapter 9, The Rapture

Jesus' description of the future aspect of the kingdom speaks of a gathering of the elect at the end of the age (Matthew 24:31). He further describes the gathering in this way,

For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. (Matthew 24:38–41, ESV)

Clearly, as in the days of the flood, right before the judgment came, the flood itself, people were conducting their lives as usual. Then the flood swept the nonbelievers away. All but Noah and his family were taken, but Noah and family were left to survive on the ark. So also, when Jesus comes, one will be taken, in judgment, but one will be left. Nonbelievers will be taken in judgment and stand before Jesus, as described in Matthew 25:31-46. They will be the goats on his left hand who are cast into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. But the sheep on Jesus' right hand at the judgment, believers, will be left to populate the kingdom. They will enter into eternal life.

But there is another gathering of the elect that is described in the New Testament, and it does not follow this pattern. How does it fit in with what is described by Jesus? Paul says it is a mystery, that is, something that has not been previously clearly revealed. Jesus did not address this gathering of the elect during his earthly ministry.

1 Corinthians 15

In 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Paul gives the order of events for the coming of the kingdom,

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he

must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:20–28, ESV)

Christ's resurrection in 33 C.E. inaugurates the beginning of the end, the critical kingdom event that leads to all the other kingdom events. The kingdom is about life, eternal life, and Jesus' resurrection is a firstfruits of many resurrections to come, of our resurrection. Then, when Christ comes, he resurrects all those who belong to him. As we will see, however, this will occur in several stages. Jesus rules over his kingdom (Revelation 20 tells us that it will be for 1,000 years), then at the end he delivers this kingdom over to the Father. Death has occurred in this millennial kingdom, but death is put to death in the eternal kingdom that Jesus' gives to the Father. Just as the resurrection of the elect occurs in stages, so the development of the kingdom occurs in stages.

Paul reveals to us a more specific development of this kingdom later in this chapter,

I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory?"

O death, where is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:50–57, ESV)

Typically, resurrection is said to occur to those who have already died. Their bodies need resurrecting, whereas their souls have gone to heaven and need reuniting with their resurrected bodies. But what about those who have not died when the kingdom comes, when Jesus returns? Paul says we will not all die, or "sleep." And those who are alive when the kingdom comes will experience their resurrection without dying first. Their bodies will be changed, will be made imperishable, without undergoing death. Their spirits will not depart from their bodies. Rather, the whole process of resurrection will occur for them without that terrifying experience. Then, when everyone is resurrected, Death will have been defeated once and for all.

1 Thessalonians 4&5

Paul gives more details on this resurrection of the living in his first letter to the Thessalonians, but it comes in the context of a concern the Thessalonians had about those who had already died, and whether they would be resurrected first,

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, ESV)

On the face of it, this passage clearly answers the question of who will be raised first. First will be those who have already died in Christ, then those who are still alive at his coming will be made imperishable without having to go through death, as Paul explained to the Corinthians. We are even given the unusual description of Jesus bringing with him from heaven the souls of those who have died so they can be rejoined to their resurrected bodies.

But Paul's instruction here raises new questions for us. It would be most natural to understand this coming of Jesus as the one described in Matthew 24, with the non-elect being taken in judgment and the living elect being made imperishable in their bodies without having to die, and, of course, with all those who have already died being resurrected. But this doesn't seem to fit with the description given us of the millennial kingdom that begins after this, as described in Revelation 20. In that form of the kingdom some of the subjects rebel and attack Jesus in Jerusalem. How could resurrected believers rebel that way? They couldn't. Where do these rebels come from who reject Jesus' authority? They must have been born in the kingdom. But do resurrected believers have children?

Jesus taught that at the resurrection believers are not given in marriage (Matthew 22:23-33) but are like the angels in heaven. There are a lot of inferences that must be made here. Do angels reproduce? It seems not, and thus it seems neither will resurrected humans. That means that during the millennial kingdom there must be unresurrected believers who are capable of having children who grow up unsaved and try to throw off Jesus' rule. This means that at Jesus' coming to earth, as described in Matthew 24, the elect who are gathered are not resurrected yet, and this fits with John's description in Revelation 20 that speaks of their resurrection occurring after the millennium,

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark

on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6, NIV)

Those who died during the persecution of the time of tribulation are indeed resurrected and reign with Jesus for a thousand years (so there are resurrected believers during the millennium), but this is the first resurrection. This implies a second resurrection to come, a resurrection for those who die during the millennium. The only ones who could die during the millennium would be those who have not been resurrected, that is, the believers who were alive when Jesus came to earth and entered the kingdom without resurrected bodies. They can still have children, and some of those children and grandchildren will be the ones who rebel against Jesus during this phase of the kingdom. At the next phase, the eternal kingdom, the bodies of those who believe will be resurrected or made imperishable.

So when did the first resurrection occur? It occurred as Paul describes it in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, when Jesus came in the air, not to the earth. As Paul says, the resurrected ones and those made imperishable without dying, join Jesus in the air. This is a phase of Jesus' coming that takes place in the air before he returns to the earth. This is one of the stages of resurrection that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15. If this is the way it happens, then we may say that the description of "being caught up together...in the clouds" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) with Jesus must be pre-tribulation (before the time of the tribulation), because otherwise we have no one to populate the kingdom who can have children.

This makes good sense of what follows in Paul's letter,

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3, ESV)

If the rapture (we get this term from the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, "caught up" being in Latin, *rapturo*) takes place at the end of the time of tribulation, there is no reason for the people to be saying, "There is peace and security," because they are experiencing just the opposite of that as God's judgments, described in Revelation 6-18, are poured out on the earth. But if the catching up, the rapture, occurs pre-tribulation, this makes perfect sense.

2 Thessalonians 2

Like us, Paul's teaching does not leave us without some confusion. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, this church has some more consternation about Jesus coming in this way.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (2 Thessalonians 2:1–4, ESV)

The coming of Jesus to gather to himself those who believe is intimately connected to the Day of Yahweh, the Day of the Lord. The Day of Yahweh, as we have seen, includes judgment for nonbelievers. The description of this judgment as seen in Revelation 6-18 and Matthew 24&25 is quite dire. We can imagine the Thessalonian believers would be upset to think that this day was come for just that reason. But there will be believers during this time who must experience, indirectly, to be sure, God's judgment, though they will be protected from it overall (Revelation 3:10). But if they believe that they would have been raptured before this tribulation, that would greatly concern them, suggesting that perhaps they were overlooked or were not, in fact, saved. They would naturally be "shaken" and "alarmed" by that.

But Paul reminds them that the time of tribulation at the Day of Yahweh will not happen without two major events happening, the "rebellion" and the revealing of the son of destruction who desecrates the temple. As we have seen, Jesus describes this desecration, mentioned first by Daniel, as the turning point that initiates the time of great distress or tribulation (Matthew 24:15-21). If the Thessalonians have not seen this occur, they need not worry that the rapture has already occurred and they missed it.

Paul then reassures them further with these words,

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:5–12, ESV)

Something is currently restraining the son of destruction, the man of lawlessness, from being revealed. "He" who now restrains the man of lawlessness will be taken out of the way, to allow the antichrist to appear, delude people into making a covenant with Israel for seven years (Daniel 9), allow for the temple to be rebuilt (for it currently does not exist), only to desecrate it 3 and a half years into the covenant. That is when Jesus will inaugurate the massive judgments of Revelation 6-18 and finish them with his personal appearance to lead his army against the man of lawlessness described in Revelation 19, in which the antichrist is destroyed and cast into the lake of fire with the false prophet (verse 20).

Since the Thessalonians have not seen this occur yet, they need not worry that the rapture has occurred without them.

Two Rapture Views

Two views of the timing of the rapture have developed to explain Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture

This view holds that Christ's coming will be in two stages, one a coming in the air only to resurrect those who have already died in Christ and to catch up and transform those who are alive at the time and believe in Jesus, and then a second coming all the way to the earth to finish off the judgments of the tribulation period. There are three versions of this first view:

1. The rapture will occur before the beast/antichrist/man of lawlessness makes covenant with Israel for seven years.
2. The rapture will occur right before the antichrist breaks the covenant, that is, three and a half years into the seven-year covenant, sometimes called the mid-tribulation rapture view, conceiving of the tribulation as a seven year period.
3. The rapture will occur after the antichrist breaks the covenant, but before the outpouring of God's judgment occurs, sometimes called the pre-wrath rapture view.

Technically, the time of tribulation is only three and a half years, elsewhere in Revelation called "times, time and half a time" (Revelation 12:14), and "1,260 days" (Revelation 11:3; 12:6), so the first of the pre-tribulation rapture views is purely arbitrary. The third of these views sees a time within the tribulation in which God's wrath is not being poured out. But these are all essentially the same view.

The Post-Tribulation Rapture

This view holds that there can only be one coming of Christ, not a dual-phased coming, since the same language is used each time, and that there is no reason to rapture believers before the tribulation period, since all believers are slated for persecution like that which happens during the tribulation, and because the wrath poured out is not directed at believers but at unbelievers, believers being protected from God's direct wrath.

The main problem with the post-tribulation rapture view, as we have seen, is accounting for unbelievers during the millennium who can mount a rebellion against Jesus (Revelation 20). If all believers are raptured, resurrected and transformed, at the end of the tribulation, then only resurrected and glorified believers enter the millennial kingdom, and it is impossible to see them rebelling against Jesus. And they cannot have children during the millennium because resurrected people, we believe in accord with Matthew 22, do not marry and therefore do not have children but are like the angels of heaven who do not reproduce. The only ones who could rebel against Jesus' rule would be unbelievers, who could only be children born to unresurrected believers who enter the millennial kingdom.

Chapter 10, The Tribulation

They say it's always darkest before the dawn. And in terms of the coming of the kingdom, that is certainly true. Daniel had predicted:

²⁶ After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. ²⁷ He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. (Daniel 9:26-27, NIV)

Jesus, following this prophecy, asserts that before he returns,

¹⁵ "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place" (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ "then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ A man on the housetop must not come down to get things out of his house, ¹⁸ and a man in the field must not go back to get his coat. ¹⁹ Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days! ²⁰ Pray that your escape may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. ²¹ For at that time there will be great distress, the kind that hasn't taken place from the beginning of the world until now and never will again. ²² Unless those days were cut short, no one would be saved. But those days will be cut short because of the elect.

Jesus said this time at the end of the present age, this time of unparalleled great distress (the King James Version says, "great tribulation") would be so dire that if it lasted any longer (three and a half years), no one would survive. This is the ultimate Day of Yahweh, the time of God's universal judgment on earth because of her idolatries.

Timeframe

Jesus speaks of the timeframe in which the signs of his coming and the end of the age will occur (Matthew 24:3), making a division between the birth pangs and the tribulation proper (advanced labor). The demarcation is the "abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15). Jesus is referencing the prophecy of Daniel and his timeline:

²⁷ He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him. (Daniel 9:27, NIV)

Daniel is referring to the ruler of the people who will come, the ruler who establishes a seven year covenant with Israel. He breaks this covenant midway, that is, three and a half years in, and sets up an abomination in the temple that makes it desolate, that puts an end to sacrifice and offering in the temple.

This three-and-a-half-year timeframe after the breaking of the covenant is the focus of Revelation 6-19 and is also referred to as "time, times, and half a time," and "1260 days," and "forty two months" (Revelation 12:14; 11:3; 11:2; 13:5). The great tribulation Jesus speaks of is the three and a half years following the abomination of desolation.

The Temple

The abomination of desolation is the desecration of the temple, which Paul tells us will be caused by the man of sin, the antichrist, the beast empowered by Satan, setting up an image of himself in the temple and seats himself in the temple demanding worship:

⁴ He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits in God's temple, proclaiming that he himself is God. (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

This presumes, of course, that there is a temple in Jerusalem for this desecration to occur, one in which, as Daniel describes, is the site for sacrifices and offerings in accordance with the Law of Moses (Daniel 9:27). When is this temple built? We don't know. But it could be that the covenant that the ruler/antichrist makes with Israel for seven years is what enables the temple to be built in Jerusalem. And it would also make sense of the way the covenant is violated, by the antichrist desecrating the temple.

A covenant with Israel, though it only be for seven years, is tantamount to a treaty of peace with Israel. The antichrist is playing the long game for world domination. He draws Israel in, then attacks.

Satan Cast from Heaven

The true motivation for the antichrist's desecration of the temple is Satan. And Satan's timing for the attack on Israel is his being expelled from heaven. Revelation 12 tells us what happens:

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, ⁸ but he could not prevail, and there was no place for them in heaven

any longer. ⁹So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him. (Revelation 12:1-9, CSB)

This is not something that occurred in the ancient past but is actually yet future. In what follows we are told,

Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you with great fury, because he knows his time is short. ¹³When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent's presence to her place in the wilderness, where she was nourished for a time, times, and half a time. ¹⁵From his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river flowing after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river that the dragon had spewed from his mouth. ¹⁷So the dragon was furious with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep the commands of God and hold firmly to the testimony about Jesus. (Revelation 12:12b-17, CSB)

Satan's time is short, we're told, and the time he has left is forty-two months (Revelation 13:5), or the three and half years of the great tribulation, during which God is judging the wicked, as we will see. Satan is operating on God's timetable, not his own. He is cast out of heaven, to which he has had access from the beginning (Job 1&2, Revelation 12:10). God is confronting Satan, pushing him forward in his plan to destroy the seed of the woman, telling him to do his worst now, because God is bringing the age to a close with His judgment on earth.

Satan's response, and we might say his last play against the seed of the woman, is to possess and empower two men to carry out his bid for world domination. Revelation 13 describes both these men:

And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads. On its horns were ten crowns, and on its heads were blasphemous names. ²The beast I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. The dragon gave the beast his power, his throne, and great authority. ³One of its heads appeared to be fatally wounded, but its fatal wound was healed.

The whole earth was amazed and followed the beast. ⁴They worshiped the dragon because he gave authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to wage war against it?"

⁵The beast was given a mouth to utter boasts and blasphemies. It was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶It began to speak blasphemies against God: to blaspheme his name and his dwelling—those who dwell in heaven. ⁷And it was permitted to wage war against the saints and to conquer them. It was also given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. ⁸All those who live on the earth will worship it, everyone whose name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered. (Revelation 13:1-8, CSB)

And,

¹¹ Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. ¹² It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf and compels the earth and those who live on it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. ¹³ It also performs great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in front of people. ¹⁴ It deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs that it is permitted to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who live on the earth to make an image of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵ It was permitted to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast could both speak and cause whoever would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶ And it makes everyone—small and great, rich and poor, free and slave—to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, ¹⁷ so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark: the beast’s name or the number of its name.

¹⁸ This calls for wisdom: Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, because it is the number of a person. Its number is 666. (Revelation 13:11-18, CSB)

Like in Daniel, from God’s perspective these enemies of man and God are best depicted as savage beasts, not humans. The first beast is variably called the “beast” (in Revelation), the antichrist (1 John 2: 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7), the “ruler” or “prince” of the people to come (Daniel 9:26), and the “man of lawlessness” or “sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). He is a blasphemous person who has experienced what seemed a fatal wound but was healed, seeks worship, and seeks world domination.

The second beast is a dragon in lamb’s clothing who speaks on behalf of the beast, the antichrist, his second in command, who finds ways to compel people to worship the first beast, including doing miracles and controlling commerce by means of requiring a mark of the first beast on human right hands or foreheads that permits them to buy and sell. This mark has some significance to the number 666 (though some manuscripts read 616 instead). He is later referred to as the false prophet (Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Together with Satan and the Beast, they make an unholy trinity.

Revelation 17 and 18 describes Satan’s attempt to conquer the world through the Beast:

¹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me: “Come, I will show you the judgment of the notorious prostitute who is seated on many waters. ²The kings of the earth committed sexual immorality with her, and those who live on the earth became drunk on the wine of her sexual immorality.” ³Then he carried me away in the Spirit to a wilderness. I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. (Revelation 17:1-3, CSB)

Though the focus of this prophecy is on the “notorious prostitute,” an economic superpower (later identified as Babylon) who is an icon of idolatry, which, from God’s perspective is unfaithfulness to God, hence, sexual immorality, it appears that initially the beast, who dominates several nations, serves the prostitute (she sits on him as beast of burden). This is not his preferred relationship to Babylon. He wants to rule over her.

¹⁵ He also said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute was seated, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. ¹⁶ The ten horns you saw, and the beast, will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, devour her flesh, and burn her up with fire. ¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his plan by having one purpose and to give their kingdom^[a] to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸ And the woman you saw is the great city that has royal power over the kings of the earth.” (Revelation 17:15-18, CSB).

The beast has power over seven and then eight nations, and great influence over ten nations, but he wants it all, and the city of Babylon is standing in his way. In this three-and-a-half-year period he manages to feel empowered enough to finally overthrow Babylon. This is all in the plan of God. Her destruction is sung about in Revelation 18:

It has fallen, Babylon the Great has fallen! She has become a home for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, and a haunt for every unclean and despicable beast. (verse 2)

Then fresh from his victory over Babylon, emboldened by it, the Beast marches on Israel. Only, Jesus is returning from heaven and engages him in battle:

¹⁹ Then I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ But the beast was taken prisoner, and along with it the false prophet, who had performed the signs in its presence. He deceived those who accepted the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image with these signs. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹ The rest were killed with the sword that came from the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds ate their fill of their flesh. (Revelation 19:19-21, CSB)

This is depicted in the Old Testament prophet Zechariah this way:

¹ Look, a day belonging to the LORD is coming when the plunder taken from you will be divided in your presence. ² I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem for battle. The city will be captured, the houses looted, and the women raped. Half the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be removed from the city.

³ Then the LORD will go out to fight against those nations as he fights on a day of battle. ⁴ On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. The Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, forming a huge valley, so that half the mountain will move to the north and half to the south... ⁸ On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea, in summer and winter alike. ⁹ On that day the LORD will become King over the whole earth—the LORD alone, and his name alone... ¹² This will be the plague with which the LORD strikes all the people who have warred against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. ¹³ On that day a

great panic from the LORD will be among them, so that each will seize the hand of another, and the hand of one will rise against the other. ¹⁴ Judah will also fight at Jerusalem, and the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected: gold, silver, and clothing in great abundance. ¹⁵ The same plague as the previous one will strike the horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and all the animals that are in those camps. (Zechariah 14:1-4, 8-9, 12-15)

Apostasy

Paul tells the Thessalonians that Christ will not come again until there is a great apostasy, fomented, not doubt, by the Beast, or as Paul calls him, the man of lawlessness:

³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits in God's temple, proclaiming that he himself is God.

⁵ Don't you remember that when I was still with you I used to tell you about this? ⁶ And you know what currently restrains him, so that he will be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one now restraining will do so until he is out of the way, ⁸ and then the lawless one will be revealed. The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth and will bring him to nothing at the appearance of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan's working, with every kind of miracle, both signs and wonders serving the lie, ¹⁰ and with every wicked deception among those who are perishing. They perish because they did not accept the love of the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God sends them a strong delusion so that they will believe the lie, ¹² so that all will be condemned—those who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12)

Paul seems to be indicating that the one who is currently restraining the coming of the man of lawlessness will be in some sense taken “out of the way.” This seems to be referring to the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent to be a Helper like himself (John 14:15-18). Could this be an oblique way of referencing the rapture? When all believers are taken up to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) there will be a marked absence of the Spirit's presence in believers. And this lack of believers empowered by the Spirit would be a removal of restraint on the lawlessness Paul describes and an occasion for apostasy.

Jesus describes this apostasy, or turning away from the Lord, this way:

⁴ Jesus replied to them, “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and they will deceive many... ⁹ “Then they will hand you over to be persecuted, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of my name. ¹⁰ Then many will fall away, betray one another, and hate one another. ¹¹ Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. ¹² Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold... ²³ “If anyone tells you then, ‘See, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Over here!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ For false

messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:4-5, 9-12, 23-24)

Outpouring of Judgment

The Day of Yahweh, that is, the Day of Christ, is one of judgment on nonbelievers followed by blessing on believers. The judgment is described in vivid detail in Revelation 6-19. It parallels the judgment Jesus describes in Matthew 24.

7 Seals	7 Trumpets	7 Bowls	Matthew 24
[Satan cast to earth in middle of tribulation, ch. 12, energizes the beast, false prophet	Beast out of the sea to break covenant with Israel, ch. 13 (Dan. 9)	God seals the 144,000 to protect them as they preach the gospel, ch. 7	Abomination that desolates, vv. 15-28, gospel preached in all the world
#1 war (6:2)	#1 hail, fire blood on 1/3 of earth (8:7)	#1 sores 16:2	False messiahs (5)
#2 war (6:3)	#2 1/3 sea turned to blood (8:8)	#2 all the sea dies (16:3)	Wars (6,7)
#3 famine (6:5)	#3 1/3 fresh water made bitter (8:10)	#3 all fresh water become blood (16:4)	Famine, earthquake (7)
#4 death (6:7)	#4 1/3 sun, moon, stars darkened (8:12)	#4 scorching (16:8)	Persecution, death (9) sun/moon darkened, stars fall (29)
#5 martyrdom (6:9)	#5 locust plague for 5 months (9:1)	#5 darkness (16:10)	Betrayal, apostasy (10)
#6 earthquake, sun black, moon red, stars fall (6:12)	#6 1/3 of mankind killed (9:13)	#6 dried Euphrates allows armies from east (16:12)	False prophets (11)
#7 announces 1 st trumpet	#7 earthquake, 1/10 of cities destroyed (11:15)	#7 earthquake of unparalleled proportions (16:17)	sign of Son of Man appears (30) at the end

It is obvious as you graph the various judgments this way that there are some parallels, as would be expected, and though some of the judgments are repeated, they are successively worse than their predecessors. Judgment is building to a crescendo, as is persecution of believers, as is war in the world.

The culmination of the judgment is the coming of Jesus to earth with his army to defeat the Beast and his armies at Jerusalem, and outside Jerusalem at Har Megiddo, or the Mountain of Megiddo, sometimes rendered Armageddon (Revelation 16:16):

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns^[d] were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. ¹³ He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, wearing pure white linen. ¹⁵ A sharp^[e] sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule^[f] them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. ¹⁶ And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (Revelation 19:11-16)

Evangelism

Jesus said that he would not come until “This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations” (Matthew 24:14). Though all believers have been taken up in the clouds with Jesus at the Rapture before the Tribulation, many people get saved more or less right away. Paul has told us, no doubt taught by Zechariah 10:8-9; 12:10; 13:1-3,9. Paul says:

²⁵ I don't want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not be conceited: A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins. (Romans 11:25-27)

Revelation 7 seems to describe how this conversion of Israel takes place:

¹ After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, restraining the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel rising up from the east, who had the seal of the living God. He cried out in a loud voice to the four angels who were allowed to harm the earth and the sea, ³ “Don't harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we seal the servants of our God on their foreheads.” ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed:

144,000 sealed from every tribe of the Israelites: ⁵ 12,000 sealed from the tribe of Judah, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶ 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷ 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸ 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 sealed from the tribe of Benjamin. (Revelation 7:1-8, CSB)

We're told, immediately after this description of sealing these Israelites, for protection, we are told, that:

⁹ After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud

voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb! (Revelation 7:9-10, CSB)

If this is meant to be a consequence of the sealing of the 144,000 Jews, then it seems these sealed Jewish people were being protected in order to give witness to Jesus as Messiah, reaching not only Jews but Gentiles as well. Though God is pouring out judgment on the earth, He is at the same time offering salvation to all who would come.

The Tribulation is a terrible time of suffering for the lost world. It is concluded with the return of Jesus to earth to rule as king, his first act being to conduct a judgment of all unbelievers who survived (Matthew 25). This is his act of setting up his kingdom, with his capital in Jerusalem.

Chapter 11, The Millennium

A millennium is a period of 1,000 years. There is one passage in the New Testament that mentions this time frame for Christ's rule on earth, and that is Revelation 20. Some take the passage as giving a literal time frame (Premillennialists), others a symbolic one (Amillennialists and Postmillennialists). The passage reads as follows after a description of Jesus' victory over the Beast or Antichrist (in chapter 19):

¹ And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷ When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And 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.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the

books.¹³ *The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.*¹⁴ *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.*¹⁵ *Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.* (Revelation 20, NIV)

Millennial Views

Amillennialists believe the millennium is occurring now. It is Christ's reign from heaven which will culminate in his coming to earth to institute the eternal kingdom described in Revelation 21 and 22. They see this chapter, chapter 20, as describing Jesus' reign now (verses 1-6) and his second coming described in verses 7-15. They argue that chapter 20 does not follow chapter 19 chronologically, but is simply the theme of Christ's present rule picked up again. Satan is currently chained in a figurative sense only in regard to deceiving the nations, though he can still deceive individuals. The thousand years is not literal, of course, but signifies a long time. In fact, Jesus' rule from heaven has lasted now almost 2,000 years. Believers reigning means their state of blessedness in heaven. Satan's release from bondage occurs at the end of the age leading to a major resistance to the gospel worldwide and great persecution of the church. Christ then comes with fire to judge the world, Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

Postmillennialists believe the millennium will occur in this age. It will be a time in which either "worldwide revival and mass conversions" or "the imposition of Christian ideals by converted rulers and Christian governments" will Christianize the world.¹⁷ The warfare of chapter 19 is the church warring against unbelief, resulting in the binding of Satan in chapter 20 and the influence of the gospel becoming victorious for a thousand years, that is, a lengthy period of time. The first resurrection is a spiritual one, to be followed by the implied second resurrection that constitutes an even greater victory. The release of Satan after this period results either in "political persecution" or a "spiritual conflict between truth and error."¹⁸ Then Christ comes (after the Millennium) and judges the world, both righteous and wicked. There is no mention of the destiny of the righteous until chapters 21 and 22.

This author follows the Premillennial view, which sees chapter 20 as following chapter 19 chronologically. Chapter 19 is the second coming of Christ and chapter 20 is Christ's thousand-year reign on earth before he turns over the kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24) to the Father and begins the eternal form of the kingdom described in Revelation 21 and 22.

Judgment of Satan

Revelation 20:1-3 describes the binding of Satan at the beginning of the Millennium. This binding prevents Satan from "deceiving the nations" until after the 1,000 years. Why must this happen? It is to

¹⁷ Revelation, Four Views, edited by Steve Gregg, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997, p. 459.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.475

show that despite Satan's absence from earth so that there is no ability to inspire rebellion against Christ's rule, there will be humans who, because of their own sinful nature, are willing to be led in rebellion against Christ. Though Jesus provides a pure and perfect kingdom in which no one who is spiritual could complain, those who are the unbelieving children and grandchildren of the believers who enter the kingdom unresurrected, will find reason to complain that springs from their own unwillingness to be ruled, even though ruled by the perfect ruler, Jesus Christ.

God is showing humanity that they cannot entirely blame the devil for all the evil that has arisen on earth. Adam and Eve could not entirely blame the serpent for their rebellion, and neither can we. We have the seeds of our own rebellion in ourselves. As Paul said in Ephesians 2:1-4, there are three influences that lead to sin in the world: Satan (the prince of the power of the air), the world (the aggregate of sinful persons desiring to bring all into league with them in their rebellion against God), and our own sinful natures. The Millennium will demonstrate that the main influence in our lives to evil is our own natures. Even without Satan's prompting we are fully capable of and prone to self-rule apart from God. We think we can do better than God at ruling our lives. Indeed, we hate His rule.

Life in the Millennium

Revelation 20:4-6 describes, in part, life in the Millennium, through the experience of the martyrs who were persecuted during the time of Tribulation, the three and a half years during which God's wrath was poured out on earth, as described in Revelation 6-18. God's saints, true believers, who were ushered into the kingdom after all unbelievers were judged (Matthew 25:31-46), are among those chosen to positions of leadership in Christ's kingdom. He rules from Jerusalem, but has delegates, rulers throughout the world, to bring order to the world. At first this kingdom only consists of believers, but once the unresurrected believers begin having children, there will be offspring who do not believe and whose children may not believe, so that the need for rulers among the nations becomes increasingly necessary.

Can you imagine what people under the rule of Jesus and freed from the curse on the earth could accomplish? This should be an era of unparalleled invention, improvement, and joy. Processes that led to pollution or were destructive to our earth will be replaced with ecologically sound processes. Agriculture will flourish like never before. As Amos 9:13 says, "Look, the days are coming—this is the Lord's declaration—when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the one who treads grapes, the sower of seed. The mountains will drip with sweet wine, and all the hills will flow with it."

Release of Satan and the Final Judgment

Revelation 20:7-10 shocks us with the release of Satan, who deceives the already unbelieving masses from around the world into attacking Jesus in Jerusalem, the city God loves. This is at the end of the Millennium, it seems, when after 1,000 years of perfect rule by Jesus, his rulership is rejected by the

many who do not believe and would rather have Satan's rulership, which is a promise not kept of self-rule. Divine fire comes down and destroys Satan's army, and he is thrown into the Lake of Fire where the beast (antichrist) and false prophet have already been for 1,000 years.

This ushers in the last judgment, the Great White Throne judgment, recorded in Revelation 20:11-15. The Sea, Death and Hades, the place of all the unsaved dead (see chapters 5 and 6 above), render up all for this judgment. This is the "resurrection" of the unsaved talked about in Daniel 12:2; John 5:28,29; and Acts 24:15. The judgment is based on two factors, the unbelief of each individual (their names are not written in the Book of Life) and their works. Various levels of punishment are meted out based on how wicked they were in life. This seems just and fair, given that not every unbeliever has been as wicked as he or she could be. They are wicked for rejecting God's authority in their lives, but they have not all been as destructive of the lives of others as some have been. We expect a Gandhi to have a lesser punishment than a Hitler or Stalin.

The Millennium having served its purpose, Jesus gives over the kingdom to his Father, and the eternal form of the kingdom, the heavenly Jerusalem come down to earth, commences.

Chapter 12, The Eternal Kingdom

Revelation 21 and 22 give us the most comprehensive picture of the eternal form of the kingdom, which follows the end of the Millennial kingdom of Revelation 20. In this form of the kingdom there will be no more death, indicating that everyone will now be resurrected and enter the kingdom with glorified bodies like Jesus (Philippians 3:21). Whereas there were resurrected and unresurrected believers populating the millennial kingdom, all the believers of the eternal kingdom will be resurrected believers.

¹ Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:1-4, NIV)

We are told that when Moses got the plans for the Tabernacle, he was shown a pattern for how it should be made (Exodus 25:9,40; Numbers 8:4). It is possible that this pattern was part of a larger heavenly form of Jerusalem, the City of God, where God dwelled and in which a temple existed. Israel’s earthly worship was conducted in imitation of heaven. Now, at the end of the ages, the “new Jerusalem” (new in regard to the old earthly Jerusalem) comes down to earth, a renewed earth replacing the one that has passed away. The old earth has been destroyed by fire:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare...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, where righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:10, 12,13 NIV)

The character of this city is described this way:

⁹ One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and

with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:9-14, NIV)

It is characterized by a full display of God's glory, likened to the glory of precious jewels, and having four walls with three gates on each wall and twelve foundations. The gates are named for the twelve tribes of Israel, showing her prominence in God's kingdom as the chosen nation that first represented God's kingdom and through whom Messiah came. The twelve foundations are named for the twelve apostles, who represent the church, which became the representative of God's kingdom during Israel's hardness of heart and until her conversion (Romans 11).

The dimensions of the heavenly Jerusalem come down to earth are so immense we must surely understand the renewal of the earth as something that makes it possible for such a structure to reside.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. (Revelation 21:15-17, NIV)

The measurements in terms of modern measurement are walls 1,400 miles (2,200 kilometers) wide each, and the same height. On our current earth our atmosphere ends and outer space begins at 62 miles (100 kilometers). Why such an extraordinary size for these walls and this city? Jesus said his Father's house had many rooms (John 14:2), and though we don't know how many rooms will be required for all the saved of earth in all generations to reside, this structure will certainly accommodate them.

Life in the new Jerusalem is not fully described, but a partial description includes,

²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:22-27, NIV)

No temple is needed any longer because we will be in the direct presence of the Father and the Son (and, we may presume, the Holy Spirit). There will be no day or night, something unique to us who have been on a planet rotating on its axis and alternately facing away from the sun for half of its day. It seems that there will be delineated kingdoms that reside outside the city, with access to the city at all times. There will be no change in the earth's population, since resurrected, glorified people do not reproduce, but are like the angels in this regard (Matthew 22:30). And nothing impure will enter the city because only believers will exist in the kingdom. Unbelievers will be in the Lake of Fire.

As the garden of Eden was watered by God and the tree of life provided eternal life for Adam and Eve, so the new Jerusalem will be watered by the river of life and the tree of life will grow here. The tree of life stands on each side of the river of life, perhaps indicating that it straddles it, with roots growing down each side.

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 21:1-5, NIV)

What was begun in Eden is completed in the eternal kingdom.

It is fascinating to speculate about what life in the eternal kingdom will be like. Spending eternity in any way is difficult to conceive of. We will live forever in our glorified or resurrected bodies, capable as Jesus was, we may speculate, of traveling instantly anywhere without a vessel (Luke 24:31) and entering closed spaces without coming in a door or window (John 20:19). Will we be able to do interplanetary travel, visiting the billions of planets and stars God created? Does earth exist in a newly created universe? Again, all speculation. It is unlikely we will be idle for eternity. God is a worker and so, as His image bearers, are we. We will not be satisfied if we are not in some sense creating. It will be exciting to see what we are able to make and create under submission to the King.

But the focus of Scripture at this point is on our serving the Father and the Son, and seeing God's face, something no one has ever been able to do. And there will be "twelve crops of fruit" being yielded every month from the tree of life, and we may presume it will need some harvesting, suggesting work to do in the kingdom. Though it is said that there will be no more curse, we may presume that was true from the Millennial kingdom as well. And once again, as we were designed to do at creation, we will reign with our God. We were always designed to be rulers of God's creation, and that is finally and eternally fulfilled in the eternal kingdom. Reigning implies making leadership decisions and wise judgments. We will not be idle in the kingdom.

Chapter 13, Summary of Eschatology

We haven't much used the term "eschatology" yet, so we should define it. It is a summarizing term in theology to mean "last things" or "the study of last things." There is general eschatology, the last things that will happen to the whole world, and there is special eschatology, what will happen to individuals at death.

General Eschatology

The present age, which began at creation, reaches its last stage at the first coming of Christ, the seed of the woman predicted in Genesis 3:15, who will give a lethal blow to the head of the serpent. We are now in the last times of this present age, awaiting the last days, which will be the Day of Yahweh or the Day of Christ, His judgment and the ushering in of the kingdom. Here are the events that will happen at that time:

The Rapture:

All believers, dead and alive, will be resurrected. Those dead will have their spirits brought from heaven and joined to their resurrected bodies, while those alive will not die but be given resurrection bodies. We will all join Jesus in the air, ready to come down with him to fight the last battle.

The Covenant Between Israel and the Antichrist:

The ruler of the people to come will inaugurate the last seven years of the 490 year timeline of Daniel by making a covenant with Israel of peace, despite his desire to conquer Israel.

Rebuilding of the Temple:

Israel will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reinstitute sacrifices.

Expulsion of Satan from Heaven and Desecration of the Temple:

The antichrist will break covenant with Israel three and a half years into the seven-year covenant, enter the temple and set himself up as God to be worshiped, and set up an image of himself that the false

prophet is able to animate. This will coincide with Satan's expulsion from heaven and his hand being forced by God to carry out his strategy for world domination and destruction of the holy seed (believers).

Worldwide Monetary Imperialism and Worldwide Evangelism:

The antichrist will destroy the economic superpower Babylon and inaugurate worldwide control of the market, requiring his mark on hand or forehead for any who want to buy and/or sell. At the same time there will be a surge of evangelism, led in part by 144,000 converted Jews, that will see a huge response in Israel and the world.

Outpouring of Divine Judgments:

In three phases, the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments, and the bowl judgments will be inflicted on the earth, leading to a huge devastation of the ecosystem and vast loss of life.

Antichrist's March on Jerusalem and Jesus' Return to Defeat Him:

When the Beast makes his move to conquer Israel, Jesus returns all the way to earth, his army of resurrected saints with him, to defeat the Beast and his army, casting the Beast and the False Prophet into the Lake of Fire. Satan is confined to the Abyss for 1,000 years.

The Sheep and Goat Judgment and the Establishment of Jesus' Kingdom:

Jesus judges the nations (Matthew 25), all who are still alive, and condemns the nonbelievers to the eternal fire prepared for Satan and his angels. Jesus establishes his rule from Jerusalem (Revelation 20:9), which lasts for 1,000 years.

Release of Satan Leading to the Final Insurrection:

Satan is released from the Abyss and rouses nonbelievers to rebel against Jesus and march on his capital in Jerusalem, only to be defeated and cast into the Lake of Fire.

The Great White Throne Judgment:

The final judgment of all the nonbelieving dead is presided over by Jesus, who condemns them for their failure to believe (their names are not in the Book of Life) and for their deeds, and consigns them to the Lake of Fire for judgment in line with their deeds.

The New Heaven and Earth for the Heavenly Jerusalem:

Jesus remakes the earth and brings down from heaven the "holy city, the New Jerusalem," where all believers live, and God presides over the eternal form of the kingdom.

Special or Individual Eschatology

The sequence of events for those who die, believers and nonbelievers.

For Believers:

- The spirit of the believer is escorted to Heaven (Luke 16:22).
- At the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5) believers are granted rewards in accord with how they lived on earth.
- Just prior to Christ's second coming to earth, believers are given their resurrected bodies, some while they are still alive on earth, and they remain with Jesus in the clouds in anticipation of his pouring out of judgments and his final return to earth.
- Resurrected believers live with those who believed and have not died in the millennial kingdom ruled by Christ.
- Believers who die during the millennium reside as spirits in heaven until the end of the millennium, when they are then given their bodily resurrection.
- All believers come to reside in the newly remade earth in the New Jerusalem forever.

For Nonbelievers:

- The spirit of the nonbeliever awakens in Hades.
- At the end of the millennial kingdom, the spirits of all in Hades are given resurrected bodies (though not of the same kind as believers), and are judged at the Great White Throne judgment according to the Book of Life and the Books of the Deeds and assigned a judgment in the Lake of Fire commensurate with their deeds, where they spend eternity.

Appendix 1: A Quick Explanation of Dispensational Perspective

God deals with humanity the way a parent deals with a child...

When our child is just a toddler...	When our child is a pre-teen...	When our child is an adult...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't touch the blu-ray machine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show me how to use the blu-ray 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have their own blu-ray
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love your brother and sister 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love your brother and sister 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love your brother and sister
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold my hand when you cross the street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold your brother's hand when we cross the street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold my hand when we cross the street
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a nap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can date when you're 16 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give me grandkids

The overall plan and purpose is one: to help my child become a fully functioning adult. But at individual times in his or her life the way to accomplish that purpose is different because of each child's different needs.

The nation Israel	The Church	The Kingdom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law of Moses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law of Christ (1 Cor 9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law of the kingdom?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean/unclean foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All foods clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All foods clean
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripture to guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripture to guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Scripture needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love your neighbor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love your neighbor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love your neighbor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabbath on Saturday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabbath on any day (Ro 14) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perpetual Sabbath?

God has dealt with humanity through the chosen nation, Israel, and then as a multi-nation conglomerate of believers, and will finally deal with us under His direct rule in the kingdom. Some laws will remain the same, some will be modified, some will be new, but all will be purposed toward guiding us in what pleases Him and is best for us and our thriving.

Appendix 2: Biblical Teaching of the Resurrection

I. Old Testament

A. Explicit statements

1. Daniel 12:1-3
2. Job 19:25,26
3. Psalm 49:15
4. Isaiah 26:19

B. Suggestive statements

1. Genesis 22:5 (Abraham will bring back the resurrected Isaac with him after sacrificing him)
2. Exodus 3:6 (Yahweh is the God of the living, not the dead)

II. New Testament

A. The nature of Christ's resurrection

1. not a resuscitation (like Lazarus and others, John 11:1-44)
2. the perfection of his same body makes it suited to eternal life (John 20:19-28)
3. physical yet with abilities unusual to our bodies (Luke 24:13-31,39; John 20:)
4. in his control and yet accomplished by the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 10:17,18; Acts 2:24; Romans 8:11)

B. The significance of Christ's resurrection

1. It insures our regeneration (1 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 2:5,6; Colossians 3:1)
2. It insures our justification (Romans 4:25)
3. It insures our own bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:12-58; Philippians 3:20,21)
4. Our bodies are a significant part of who we are (2 Corinthians 5:1-4, we are naked without them, incomplete)

C. The ethical significance of Christ's resurrection

1. It gives us courage and motivation to continue laboring for Christ (1 Cor. 15:58)
2. Our focus is to be on our future heavenly existence and reward (1 Cor. 15:17-19; Col. 3:1-4)
3. We are free from the dominion of sin (Rom. 6:1-11)

Appendix 3: Israel and the Temple of Ezekiel 40-48

4 views of Ezekiel's temple:

1. The **historical prophetic** view: Ezekiel was given a vision of the temple that the returned exiles of Israel would build to replace the Solomonic temple. The dimensions and other descriptions are given in exaggerated form. But...
 - a. There is no mention of materials to be used and the location in verse 40:2 does not fit with the normal understanding of Jerusalem (i.e., a city on the southern side of a high mountain, Jerusalem sitting on the east side of the slope of Mt. Zion). This would have to be understood not as a literal description but a poetic one.
 - b. The requirements for the size and dimensions of the temple, though presented as literal, do not match the actual temple built under Zerubbabel. Did they not understand Ezekiel's prophecy to be a literal requirement for their restoration temple?
 - c. Ezekiel describes the glory of God coming to the temple in ch. 43, but there is no report, as there was with the tabernacle and Solomon's temple, of the glory of God filling the Zerubbabel temple.
 - d. Ezekiel describes a redistribution of the land in chs. 47-48, but this does not coincide with what happened in the restoration from exile.
2. The **apocalyptic symbolic** view: The temple and other related descriptions are meant to symbolize God's perfect plan for His people by using the symmetry of the temple to represent God's balanced plan for his people, by using the temple worship to represent the need for and centrality of worship, the description of the glory filling the temple representing God's presence among his people, the flowing river representing God's blessings on his people, and other descriptions representing the duties and privileges of God's people in the Messianic age. But...
 - a. This seems like a lot of useless detailed dimensional descriptions for a symbolic message. It does not become clear how this is to be applied to the present readers, except to perhaps encourage them that despite this temple being only symbolic, God was going to be among them during their exile or during the coming Messianic age.
 - b. What possible meaning does the allotment of the tribal lands have if it is only symbolic?
3. The **church fulfillment** view: The temple represents the church of Jesus Christ. But...

What possible meaning could this have had for the readers of Ezekiel's day? This is best seen as an extension of the apocalyptic symbolic view, with the original readers seeing it only in general terms, but present readers seeing the Christian significance. The same problems with the symbolic view are applicable to this view.

4. The **dispensationalist** view: This temple is the literal blueprint for the millennial temple. But...

- a. Why would there be a need for sacrifices during the millennium? This is answered by dispensationalists by viewing the sacrifices as memorial in nature. They remind us of the cost of Jesus' sacrifice and are not intended to remit sins.
- b. Why are Israel's tribes given special honors of territory near the temple?
Dispensationalists argue that Israel must have a prominent place as a nation in the millennium in order to fulfill literally the many prophecies of Israel's preeminence in the kingdom. This does not indicate that the other nations are being despised, but rather gives Israel due place as the one with whom God made the original covenant and through whom he intended to bless the world.
- c. Why is Ezekiel's language used by John in Revelation of the eternal form of the kingdom (Rev. 21,22). Dispensationalists respond that though the temple of Ezekiel is intended for the millennium, it bears a resemblance to the ultimate form of the kingdom as depicted in Revelation. In that holy city, however, there is no temple, and presumably therefore no more sacrifices. Nevertheless, the cube format, the perfect square dimensions, depicted in the millennial temple of Ezekiel, are a picture of God's perfect character and so are maintained in the dimensions of the Heavenly Jerusalem.
- d. Why is the temple and city of Ezekiel located on the south side of a high mountain? It is suggested by dispensationalists that topographical changes may occur during the return of Christ (Zech. 14) and that God may do some remodeling of the earth in that region before the construction of the new temple.

Appendix 4: Pictures of the Second Coming of Christ

Signs of the End of the Age – Matthew 24

1. False _____ (vv.4,5) [Christs]
2. Worldwide Conflicts and Disasters (vv.6-8)
3. _____ of Believers (v.9) [Persecution]
4. Apostasy and Deception (vv.10,11)
5. Increase of Wickedness (v.12)
6. Perseverance and _____ of the Gospel (vv.13,14)
[worldwide proclamation]

Disarray in Jerusalem (vv.15-22)

How Jesus will come (vv.23-31)

- Not in a _____ way [private]
- Not with miracles performed _____ us [to deceive]
- With the utmost _____ and power [visibility]
- With accompanying signs in the heavens
- With full recognition by unbelievers of their desperate situation
- With _____ accompaniment [angelic]

When Jesus will come (vv.32-44)

- Within a generation of when these signs become apparent
- Without a specific enough situation that anyone but God will know the exact time
- Unexpectedly

The Warrior Ready for Battle and a Wedding – Revelation 19

1. His judgments have avenged His servants (vv.1-4)
2. He comes to wed His bride (vv.6-9)
3. He fights the final battle against earth's pretenders to the throne (vv.11-21)

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they 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 1:10,11)

Appendix 5: Walid Shoebat Youtube Video on the Mark of the Beast – Dan Wallace

In a video that is posted on Youtube and is making the rounds in popular Christian circles, an Arab Christian claims that there are three Arabic words in Revelation 13.18, the passage that speaks about the number of the beast.

Here's the link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtquNNEO7Fw>

Walid Shoebat claims in this video that the mark of the beast is Islam itself. Certainly, Christians can recognize that Islam denies the deity of Christ, vicarious atonement, and bodily resurrection; for this reason, Islam is a false religion. We can also recognize that there are small groups of Muslims who are radical and would like to destroy Israel and America. But does this make Islam the Antichrist? That's rather doubtful.

Shoebat's basis is this: "When I first saw the Codex Vaticanus, I was literally shocked because I could read the text. It was Arabic! ... 'In the name of Allah.'"

But Shoebat did not read Codex Vaticanus. This codex is the famous fourth-century Greek New Testament (and Old Testament) manuscript that ends at Hebrews 9.13. The material added after Heb 9.13 is all in a much later hand. According to the authoritative *Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments*, 2nd edition (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), the supplement (known as codex 1957) was written in the 15th century. What Shoebat saw was not technically Codex Vaticanus but Codex 1957, a text written over a thousand years after Vaticanus.

In his video, he explains how the three Greek letters χξς in Revelation 13.18 are not really Greek at all, but Arabic. On top of the stretch to make the Arabic words fit, there are other severe problems with Shoebat's claims. As much as some Christians would like for Shoebat's interpretation to be correct, it fails at many levels. Let's examine Shoebat's claims.

1. Rev 13.18 specifically introduces this symbol as *the number of the beast*. The word 'number' is used *three* times in this verse. We are thus expecting a number, not a foreign word, to be introduced. Shoebat offers no explanation how 'number' can mean anything other than number here.

All he says is that "God is not the author of mysteries... His yoke is easy. God is not interested in gematria. Gematria is a process that was used in witchcraft." These statements are self-serving, contradictory, and incorrect. To say that God is not the author of mysteries is stunningly naïve. Of course he's the author of mysteries. "Mystery" is a word that occurs 28 times in the NT. Almost every time it is used in collocation with a positive word: 'the mystery of godliness,' 'the mystery of the gospel,' 'the mystery of faith,' etc. Jesus' parables were a form of mystery (something that was unknown to the listeners until revelation about the parables was given). Furthermore, if there is Arabic in Rev 13.18, why wouldn't that qualify as a mystery for most readers? And if no one until Walid Shoebat had properly understood the meaning here, then the text has obviously been a mystery for 1900 years. To say that "[God's] yoke is easy" is to wrench out of context what Jesus said about what it means to follow him in

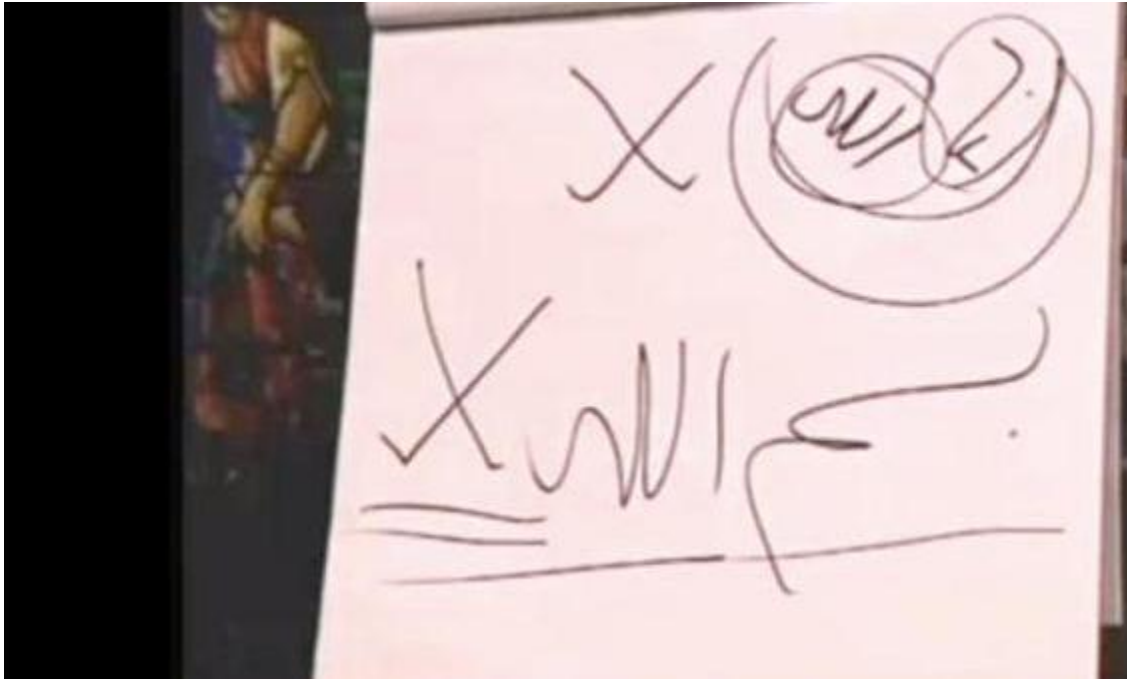
Matthew 11.29–30: his yoke is easy because it does not burden someone down with legalism. The text has nothing to do with interpretation. Judging by the disparate interpretations of scripture for the several millennia, if an easy yoke means that the interpretation of the text is plain and straightforward at all points, then scripture has created a brutally hard yoke for us.

2. Shoebat argues that Rev 13.18 can't refer to a number because gematria was evil, used in witchcraft. That may be, but even if so (Shoebat gives no evidence of this), it was not always used for evil purposes. And the fact that Rev 13.18 explicitly links a person's name to a number tells us that the author is thinking along the lines of gematria. If the number 666 is authentic, it may be significant that the gematria for the name "Jesus" (Ἰησοῦς) is 888. And just as 666 comes short of perfection, 888 is beyond perfection (since 7 is often viewed, biblically speaking, as the perfect number). Early Christians thought of some passages as involving gematria. For example, *Barnabas* 9.8 (early second century) says, concerning the 318 servants of Abraham mentioned in Gen 14.14, "For it says: 'And Abraham circumcised ten and eight and three hundred men of his household.' What, then, is the knowledge that was given to him? Observe that it mentions the 'ten and eight' first, and then after an interval the 'three hundred.' As for the 'ten and eight,' the I [*iota*] is ten and the H [*eta*] is eight; thus you have 'Jesus' [the first two letters of the name 'Jesus' in Greek]. And because the cross, which is shaped like the T [*tau*], was destined to convey grace, it mentions also the 'three hundred.' [The Greek letter *tau* had a numerical value of 300.] So he reveals Jesus in the two letters, and the cross in the other one."

Matthew's genealogy may also fit this, since his mention of three groups of 14 generations is somewhat artificial, since he skips some ancestors of Jesus. But since the name David had a gematria of fourteen, the evangelist may have been thinking along the lines of David's gematria for his grouping. Among Jews, see a similar treatment of Gen 14.14 in the Talmud (*b.Ned* 32a).

3. Arabic was a rather minor language at the time that the Apocalypse was written, almost surely unknown to John the Seer. Further, the alphabet looked quite different in the early centuries. Not only this, but the first written record we have of Arabic comes from the early sixth century—over 400 years after the Apocalypse was written. And the Greek script that Shoebat saw in Codex 1957 at the back of Vaticanus (and which he thought was Arabic) was Greek *minuscule* script, a form of script that was not used in biblical manuscripts until the 9th century! In the majuscule script (found in *all* NT manuscripts until the 9th century when the minuscule script began to take over), the letters would look like this: cxs. Are these characters Arabic? Shoebat's entire thesis crumbles at this point. There are simply too many anachronisms here for the view to have any validity.

4. A further point on the majuscule script: Below is the drawing that Shoebat made of the Arabic, which bears almost no resemblance to the majuscule text.



He makes a big point about the first letter (going from left to right): this letter is the Muslim symbol of crossed swords. But in order for it to do so, there must be a tittle at the bottom of each leg (i.e., the font must be serif on the bottom but *not* the top). This is not the way the majuscule text was written, and only by a stretch of the imagination could one see the minuscule text fitting this style. Below is a picture of the *chi* in Codex Sinaiticus, a fourth-century majuscule. Notice that any curvature is at the top, not the bottom.



The next two letters, *xi* and *sigma*, as found in Sinaiticus:



No matter how you slice it, the Arabic above simply doesn't look like the Greek.

5. Ancient Greek has no numerical symbols other than letters of the alphabet. When the Greeks wanted to write a number, they had two choices: either write out the name of the number (e.g., “six hundred and sixty-six,” as is found in Codex Sinaiticus, contrary to what Shoebat claimed), or write out the letters that were used for numbers. When they did the latter, they either wrote a horizontal line above the symbols or an acute accent afterward—both to show that this was not a word that was to be read, but something else. One of the features of the earliest copies of the Greek NT was that the manuscripts

were written in a 'documentary' hand rather than a literary hand. A documentary hand is less elegant, but also utilizes some shorthand not found in literary hands. One of the major shorthand features is using alpha-symbols for numbers. This was not done in literary writing, but it was done in documentary texts. The earliest manuscripts of Revelation do this at [Rev 13.18](#). The horizontal bar over these three letters indicate that the scribes recognized that this was not a word but a number.

6. As early as the second half of the second century AD, there is patristic discussion about the number of the beast. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, speaks about having seen early copies of the Apocalypse as having the number 666 written in this verse. He contrasts this with some more recent copies that have 616. If Shoebat is right, then what John wrote was forgotten almost immediately (for Irenaeus *thought* it represented a number), only to resurface after 1900 years. But John would have to have written the text in a form of letters that didn't come into vogue for another 700 years in order to be read as Arabic words whose alphabet could not match the Greek letters, even with the employment of a wild imagination, for at least 400 years! In other words, what Shoebat thought he saw was later Arabic forms that did not exist in John's day based on even later Greek forms that did not exist in John's day. The chronology for both the Greek being confused for Arabic and the look of the Arabic itself simply won't work in the first century.

Conspiracy theories tend to move in the realm of the non-falsifiable. They stoke the fires of imagination and fear, and give the uninformed a sense of enablement and mission because they are in the 'know.' But such theories are usually unproductive and even self-destructive, unless they are backed up with overwhelming evidence. This one isn't.

Appendix 6: Dwelling in Heaven's Suburbs

Creating a culture of resurrection is key to full-orbed ministry.

David Neff | posted 9/28/2010 09:21AM

In June, my former pastor paid me a visit. Now retired, Bob Macfarlane lives 728 miles from his former parish church. We don't see each other often anymore.

After dinner, Bob cast a backward glance. "If I had it to do over again," he said, "I think I'd preach a lot more about heaven." We talked about the preacher's resources on heaven, from ancient Scripture through Dante's 1321 *Paradiso* through Richard Baxter's 1650 *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* to Pope Benedict's 2007 encyclical *Saved in Hope* and N. T. Wright's 2008 *Surprised by Hope*. After Bob returned home, I telephoned him and we talked more.

Why preach about heaven? Bob was unashamed to confess: "The most cogent reason in my case is age. As one gets older, one begins to think there is not much of this life left," he said. "Thinking about heaven is a faithful response to the running out of the string."

Resurrection Culture

Teaching about heaven is an important ministry to believers who are getting older. Most pastors know that focusing on the aging does not pay back readily in congregational or budget growth. Instead, a focus on young adults and families often marks the church geared for growth. It is a reality of the religious marketplace. But preparing for death and for life in the presence of God is not something the old should do by themselves. Children, youth, and young adults also need to participate in these realities in order to understand the scope of Christian hope. Creating what CT editor at large Rob Moll recently called in these pages "a culture of resurrection" is foundational to full-orbed multigenerational ministry.

Teaching about heaven is also a good way to keep our vision of justice in perspective. You can't talk about paradise—the time-place where everything is right—without talking about the way things will be put right. That means we can't talk about heaven without talking about the resurrection of the body and the Last Judgment.

Our individual memories and our community stories are full of injustices—both those we suffer and those we perpetrate. In this life, there is no undoing those injustices. There can be forgiveness and reconciliation and even restitution, but we cannot recover lost lives and lost opportunities.

Scripture's earliest clear teaching of the resurrection of the dead (Dan. 12:1-3) follows a prophecy about God's people suffering unjust persecution. How will God put things right after his people experience the greatest "time of distress" since the world began? Through a general resurrection and a judgment. "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (v. 2).

In *Saved in Hope*, Pope Benedict points to the way the "Christian faith has been individualized and primarily oriented towards the salvation of the believer's own soul." As a result, he says, "in the modern era, the idea of the Last Judgment has faded into the background."

"Faith in the Last Judgment," Benedict says, is "first and foremost hope." He calls "the question of justice ... the strongest argument in favor of faith in eternal life." It is morally inconceivable "that the injustice of history should be the final word," he says, and when we face that, "the necessity for Christ's return and for new life become fully convincing."

Christians talk more about justice now than ever. God is on an intergalactic justice mission, and we are God's agents, charged with bringing about a limited and relative justice. But lest the overwhelming task make us weary, our heavenly hope keeps it in perspective. As Benedict writes, "A world which has to create its own justice is a world without hope." The restoration of justice is ultimately God's task.

A God whose justice restores lost lives and dreams should lead us to think on heaven. Practice such meditation on the life to come, wrote Baxter, and "you will find yourself in the suburbs of heaven."

In his fabulously insightful *Paradiso*, Dante visits heaven and its suburbs. In Canto III, Dante meets a former nun named Piccarda, who in her earthly life was unable to keep her vows because she had been abducted by evil men. She was thus assigned to heaven's "slowest sphere." When Dante asked if she wasn't "desirous of a higher place," she claimed utter satisfaction and blessedness. To wish for anything else would be "discordant" with God's will, she explains.

There's the secret. The Christian's future, the world's justice, and the believer's bliss are the where and when of everything and everyone being in perfect concord with God. A taste of that is available now—here in heaven's suburbs. The fullness will come in God's time by God's power. That is worth preaching about.

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Appendix 7: Finding Heaven

Where is heaven, and how will we experience it before the final resurrection?

Answered by Arthur O. Roberts | posted 04/06/2005 09:00 a.m.

Where is heaven, and how will we experience it before the final resurrection?

—Linda Montgomery, Wichita, Kansas

One popular view locates heaven in a separate, non-material world. In recent centuries scientists and clergy seemed to strike a bargain: science gets the body (and other physical substances), while religion gets the soul (and other non-material stuff). Social scientists claimed title to the psyche, however, leaving the church a wispy, anemic, spiritual realm congenial to neither scientific nor biblical insights about creation and human nature.

This view sidesteps the physicality of Jesus' incarnation and resurrection and their implications about heaven. It lacks the full force of the Christian hope for personal, conscious life after death.

Heaven is located *within* creation. It isn't tucked into a galactic corner. Rather, we can experience glimpses of heaven through ordinary senses, reason, and intuition. Heaven is behind us, among us, around us, within us, before us—eventually to be fully experienced eternally in our resurrection bodies. Heaven is as real as oceans and suns, winds and planets in a hundred billion whirling galaxies. It is as real as people with bodies, minds, and spirits.

We find intimations of heaven in stories of humankind, spiritual experiences, and nature, but in Scripture we get our fullest picture: The triumph of Christ over dark powers will release the cosmos from sin's bondage ([Rom. 8:21](#)). On the Last Day, we will become more, not less, embodied (note Rev. 21's highly physical description of heaven). Heaven is a dimension in which the cosmos is bathed in holiness ([Rev. 21:22-27](#)).

The apostle Peter understood Jesus' promise, "I go to prepare a place for you" ([John 14:2](#)), to mean not only his presence now but also a heavenly life with him. The present universe, Peter said, will be reconstituted—"a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" ([2 Pet. 3:13](#)). The apostle Paul pictured the "whole creation" groaning like a woman in labor. Those having the "firstfruits of the Spirit" eagerly anticipated bodily redemption and sharing the glory of the risen Lord ([Rom. 8:15-25](#)).

In heaven, cultures from this world will be shaped toward divine purposes ([Rev. 21:24](#)). But for all these intimations, heaven is a place we simply cannot fully imagine yet: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" ([1 Cor. 2:9](#)).

What form will we have before the final resurrection? Even with his vision of "a man in Christ" who was caught up in "the third heaven," the apostle Paul did not know whether it was in or out of the body—"God knows," he wrote ([2 Cor. 12:2-4](#)). Nor do we know whether this vision refers to a state after the final resurrection. But we do know from Paul that, on the last day, we will bear the likeness of Jesus: "And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven" ([1 Cor. 15:49](#)).

We may take our cue from Jesus. Jesus' triumph over death signals our own victory. Jesus is first through the mountain pass, as it were. Death isn't the last word; life is—personal, conscious continuation

beyond death. In post-resurrection mode, he moved between two dimensions. As earthly "children of the resurrection," we access one dimension of the kingdom of God in this life; in heaven we'll experience a new dimension of it, though still awaiting our glorified bodies. We will be with the risen Jesus ([Phil. 1:23](#)), and therefore we will be of some essence or form to perceive and reflect his likeness.

The dead in Christ aren't in limbo awaiting the end-time melding of modes. Given the relativity of time, in relation to us, they're already enjoying some form of the New Jerusalem. This "great cloud of witnesses" (Greek: "martyrs") hovers about us, mind touching mind, spirit touching spirit, and one day, at the final resurrection of the Last Day, hand grasping hand! Created in the image of God, in the new heaven and earth we will put on God's likeness. As John wrote:

"Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure" ([1 John 3:2-3](#), NRSV).

Heaven is where Jesus is; and after death some form of ourselves, reflecting the risen Jesus, will function in dimensions of reality not now accessible to us.

Arthur O. Roberts is professor at large at George Fox University and author of [Exploring Heaven: What Great Christian Thinkers Tell Us About Our Afterlife with God](#) (HarperSanFrancisco, 2003).

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Appendix 8: Heaven Is Not Our Home

The bodily resurrection is the good news of the gospel—and thus our social and political mandate.

N. T. Wright | posted 3/24/2008 08:57AM

There is no agreement in the church today about what happens to people when they die. Yet the New Testament is crystal clear on the matter: In a classic passage, Paul speaks of "the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23). There is no room for doubt as to what he means: God's people are promised a new type of bodily existence, the fulfillment and redemption of our present bodily life. The rest of the early Christian writings, where they address the subject, are completely in tune with this.

The traditional picture of people going to either heaven or hell as a one-stage, postmortem journey represents a serious distortion and diminution of the Christian hope. Bodily resurrection is not just one odd bit of that hope. It is the element that gives shape and meaning to the rest of the story of God's ultimate purposes. If we squeeze it to the margins, as many have done by implication, or indeed, if we leave it out altogether, as some have done quite explicitly, we don't just lose an extra feature, like buying a car that happens not to have electrically operated mirrors. We lose the central engine, which drives it and gives every other component its reason for working.

When we talk with biblical precision about the resurrection, we discover an excellent foundation for lively and creative Christian work in the present world—not, as some suppose, for an escapist or quietist piety.

Bodily Resurrection

While both Greco-Roman paganism and Second Temple Judaism held a wide variety of beliefs about life beyond death, the early Christians, beginning with Paul, were remarkably unanimous on the topic. When Paul speaks in Philippians 3 of being "citizens of heaven," he doesn't mean that we shall retire there when we have finished our work here. He says in the next line that Jesus will come from heaven in order to transform the present humble body into a glorious body like his own. Jesus will do this by the power through which he makes all things subject to himself. This little statement contains in a nutshell more or less all Paul's thought on the subject. The risen Jesus is both the model for the Christian's future body and the means by which it comes.

Similarly, in Colossians 3:1–4, Paul says that when the Messiah (the one "who is your life") appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. Paul does not say "one day you will go to be with him." No, you already possess life in him. This new life, which the Christian possesses secretly, invisible to the world, will burst forth into full bodily reality and visibility.

The clearest and strongest passage is Romans 8:9–11. If the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus the Messiah, dwells in you, says Paul, then the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies as well, through his Spirit who dwells in you. God will give life, not to a disembodied spirit, not to what many people have thought of as a spiritual body in the sense of a nonphysical one, but "to your mortal bodies also."

Other New Testament writers support this view. The first letter of John declares that when Jesus appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. The resurrection body of Jesus, which at the moment is almost unimaginable to us in its glory and power, will be the model for our own. And of course within John's gospel, despite the puzzlement of those who want to read the book in a very different way, we have some of the clearest statements of future bodily resurrection. Jesus reaffirms the

widespread Jewish expectation of resurrection in the last day, and announces that the hour for this has already arrived. It is quite explicit: "The hour is coming," he says, "indeed, it is already here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man, and those who hear will live; when all in the graves will come out, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment."

Life After Life After Death

Here we must discuss what Jesus means when he declares that there are "many dwelling places" in his Father's house. This has regularly been taken, not least when used in the context of bereavement, to mean that the dead (or at least dead Christians) will simply go to heaven permanently rather than being raised again subsequently to new bodily life. But the word for "dwelling places" here, *monai*, is regularly used in ancient Greek not for a final resting place, but for a temporary halt on a journey that will take you somewhere else in the long run.

This fits closely with Jesus' words to the dying brigand in Luke: "Today you will be with me in paradise." Despite a long tradition of misreading, paradise here means not a final destination but the blissful garden, the parkland of rest and tranquility, where the dead are refreshed as they await the dawn of the new day. The main point of the sentence lies in the apparent contrast between the brigand's request and Jesus' reply: "Remember me," he says, "when you come in your kingdom," implying that this will be at some far distant future. Jesus' answer brings this future hope into the present, implying of course that with his death the kingdom is indeed coming, even though it doesn't look like what anyone had imagined: "Today you will be with me in paradise." There will, of course, still be a future completion involving ultimate resurrection; Luke's overall theological understanding leaves no doubt on that score. Jesus, after all, didn't rise again "today," that is, on Good Friday. Luke must have understood him to be referring to a state of being-in-paradise. With Jesus, the future hope has come forward into the present. For those who die in faith, before that final reawakening, the central promise is of being "with Jesus" at once. "My desire is to depart," wrote Paul, "and be with Christ, which is far better."

Resurrection itself then appears as what the word always meant in the ancient world. It wasn't a way of talking about life after death. It was a way of talking about a new bodily life after whatever state of existence one might enter immediately upon death. It was, in other words, life after life after death.

What then about such passages as 1 Peter 1, which speaks of a salvation that is "kept in heaven for you" so that in your present believing you are receiving "the salvation of your souls"? Here, I suggest, the automatic assumption of Western Christianity leads us badly astray. Most Christians today, reading a passage like this, assume that it means that heaven is where you go to receive this salvation—or even that salvation consists in "going to heaven when you die." The way we now understand that language in the Western world is totally different from what Jesus and his hearers meant and understood.

For a start, heaven is actually a reverent way of speaking about God, so that "riches in heaven" simply means "riches in God's presence." But then, by derivation from this primary meaning, heaven is the place where God's purposes for the future are stored up. It isn't where they are meant to stay so that one would need to go to heaven to enjoy them. It is where they are kept safe against the day when they will become a reality on earth. God's future inheritance, the incorruptible new world and the new bodies that are to inhabit that world, are already kept safe, waiting for us, so that they can be brought to birth in the new heavens and new earth.

From Worship to Mission

The mission of the church is nothing more or less than the outworking, in the power of the Spirit, of Jesus' bodily resurrection. It is the anticipation of the time when God will fill the earth with his glory, transform the old heavens and earth into the new, and raise his children from the dead to populate and rule over the redeemed world he has made.

If that is so, mission must urgently recover from its long-term schizophrenia. The split between saving souls and doing good in the world is not a product of the Bible or the gospel, but of the cultural captivity of both. The world of space, time, and matter is where real people live, where real communities happen, where difficult decisions are made, where schools and hospitals bear witness to the "now, already" of the gospel while police and prisons bear witness to the "not yet." The world of space, time, and matter is where parliaments, city councils, neighborhood watch groups, and everything in between are set up and run for the benefit of the wider community, the community where anarchy means that bullies (economic and social as well as physical) will always win, where the weak and vulnerable will always need protecting, and where the social and political structures of society are part of the Creator's design. And the church that is renewed by the message of Jesus' resurrection must be the church that goes to work precisely in that space, time, and matter. The church claims this world in advance as the place of God's kingdom, of Jesus' lordship, and of the Spirit's power. Councils and parliaments can and often do act wisely, though they will always need scrutiny and accountability, because they in turn may become agents of bullying and corruption.

Thus the church that takes sacred space seriously (not as a retreat from the world but as a bridgehead into it) will go straight from worshipping in the sanctuary to debating in the council chamber; to discussing matters of town planning, of harmonizing and humanizing beauty in architecture, green spaces, and road traffic schemes; and to environmental work, creative and healthy farming methods, and proper use of resources. If it is true, as I have argued, that the whole world is now God's holy land, we must not rest as long as that land is spoiled and defaced. This is not an extra to the church's mission. It is central.

The church that takes seriously the fact that Jesus is Lord of all will not just celebrate quietly every time we write the date on a letter or document, will not just set aside Sunday as far as humanly and socially possible as a celebration of God's new creation, will not just seek to order its own life in an appropriate rhythm of worship and work. Such a church will also seek to bring wisdom to the rhythms of work in offices and shops, in local government, in civic holidays, and in the shaping of public life. These things cannot be taken for granted. The enormous shifts during my lifetime, from the whole town observing Good Friday and Easter, to those great days being simply more occasions for football matches and yet more televised reruns of old movies, are indices of what happens when a society loses its roots and drifts with prevailing social currents. The reclaiming of time as God's good gift (as opposed to time as simply a commodity to be spent for one's own benefit, which often means fresh forms of slavery for others) is not an extra to the church's mission. It is central.

One of the things I most enjoy about being a bishop is watching ordinary Christians (not that there are any "ordinary" Christians, but you know what I mean) going straight from worshipping Jesus in church to making a radical difference in the material lives of people down the street by running playgroups for children of single working moms; by organizing credit unions to help people at the bottom of the

financial ladder find their way to responsible solvency; by campaigning for better housing, against dangerous roads, for drug rehab centers, for wise laws relating to alcohol, for decent library and sporting facilities, for a thousand other things in which God's sovereign rule extends to hard, concrete reality. Once again, all this is not an extra to the mission of the church. It is central.

This way of coming at the tasks of the church in terms of space, time, and matter leads directly to evangelism. When the church is seen to move straight from worship of God to affecting much-needed change in the world; when it becomes clear that the people who feast at Jesus' table are the ones at the forefront of work to eliminate hunger and famine; when people realize that those who pray for the Spirit to work in and through them are the people who seem to have extra resources of love and patience in caring for those whose lives are damaged, bruised, and shamed—then it is natural for people to recognize that something is going on that they want to be part of.

No single individual can attempt more than a fraction of this mission. That's why mission is the work of the whole church, the whole time. Paul's advice to the Philippians—even though he and they knew they were suffering for their faith and might be tempted to retreat from the world into a dualistic, sectarian mentality—was upbeat. "These are the things you should think through," he wrote: "whatever is true, whatever is holy, whatever is upright, whatever is pure, whatever is attractive, whatever has a good reputation; anything virtuous, anything praiseworthy." And in thinking through these things, we will discover more and more about the same Creator God whom we know in and through Jesus Christ and will be better equipped to work effectively not over against the world, but with the grain of all goodwill, of all that seeks to bring and enhance life.

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Appendix 9: Do You Believe in Heaven?

Paradise, here we come. A majority of people in all but one of 16 countries surveyed agree on our final destination. Does such a unified belief in an afterlife mean we're all devout? Seems not. In another survey, many of the same countries shared very different opinions on how important religion is to them. In India, 92 percent said it's very important; in Russia, only 14 percent said so.

"I started to believe in heaven only as I got older and further from my Soviet upbringing. Now my belief helps me through tough times." Ludmila Maslova, 34, Moscow, Russia

"Objectively, I don't believe in heaven. But I still like to feel there is one." XiaoWang, 20, Huangshan, China

"Heaven? No. But I think we keep existing in the following generations." Frederique Audinot, 30, L'Hay-les-Roses, France

"I'm Catholic, and I do believe that life is eternal." Andre Siqueira, 30, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

You'd expect older folks to put their trust in Kingdom come, but in 6 countries – Australia, Brazil, China, Russia, Singapore, and Spain - those under 45 are most likely to believe.

Men and women voted almost evenly in 11 countries, the U.S. included. Where's the most discord? In the U.K., where 72 % of women but only 55% of men believe.

Hoping for Heaven

Malaysia	98%
Philippines	97%
U.S.	91%
India	86 %
Italy	83%
Singapore	82%
Brazil	81%
Canada	78%
Russia	76%
Australia	75%
U.K.	64%
Spain	63%
Germany	58%
China	57%
Netherlands	54%
France	50%

Around the World with one question (readersdigest.com/worldquestions)

Appendix 10: Until We Meet Again

'Does the Bible teach that we will recognize our loved ones in heaven?'—Jacqueline Hisrich, Canton, Ohio.

Daniel R. Lockwood | posted 10/23/2007 08:52AM

As the years pass, this question looms larger in my thinking. Last year, I attended three funeral services of godly saints who'd passed away. One was my 85-year-old father-in-law, whose exemplary life and witness is now just a cherished memory. For my wife, who loved her father dearly, this question is thus no idle theological speculation. Fortunately, the Bible speaks clearly to it.

The simple answer—yes—rests on two pillars of Christian belief. One is the blessed hope that we will see Jesus again (Titus 2:13). The other is the assurance that our present bodies will be raised from the dead, immortal (1 Cor. 15:12-57). Together, these pillars provide a basis for believing we will recognize our loved ones in heaven. After all, if we can recognize the Lord Jesus, possessing the perfectly restored and glorified bodies to do so, it follows that we will recognize other believers, including our loved ones. But to give more biblical shape and substance to this answer, we must distinguish between our temporary dwelling in heaven (our "intermediate state") and our eternal home in the new heaven and new earth (our ultimate destiny). Consider the following two propositions.

First, when we die, we are consciously and immediately in the presence of our Savior in heaven.

The Bible is clear that after death, two literal destinies await all humanity: eternal life and eternal death (Rom. 6:23). Those who place their faith in Jesus Christ receive everlasting life. When a believer dies, her body remains in the grave, but her soul is consciously and immediately taken into the presence of Jesus. Our soul's immediate destiny is heaven, since Jesus himself ascended into heaven (Acts 1:11) and is presently there preparing dwelling places for us (John 14:1-3).

One passage that makes it clear we are conscious with Jesus after we die is Revelation 6:9-11. There the souls of tribulation martyrs in heaven ask the Lord how long it will be until their righteous blood is avenged. Apparently without resurrected bodies yet, they are still fully conscious, having speech and recollection.

That we are immediately with Jesus after death is implicit in at least two passages: Jesus' words to the dying thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), and Paul's conviction that "we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Neither Jesus nor the apostle foresaw centuries of separation while our bodies lay in graves, awaiting the final resurrection. Rather, they anticipated an immediate reunion!

We can anticipate that as well. Though without our physical bodies, we will be able to commune with Jesus, with Abraham, and with believing loved ones who have preceded us to heaven.

Second, when Jesus returns, we will receive our resurrected bodies and live with him forever in the new heaven and new earth.

The cornerstone of all eschatological hope is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. At that moment, not before, believers in Jesus will receive their resurrected, immortal bodies: The dead in Christ will be raised and living saints will be caught up ("raptured") to meet Christ (1 Thess. 4:15-17). All who see Christ face to face shall, in that moment, become like him (1 John 3:2).

Our resurrection bodies are not merely immortal duplicates of our present ones. Consider Paul's analogy of the wheat seed (1 Cor. 15:35-38). A mortal body is like the seed, while an immortal body is like the full-grown plant. Both are physical, with an intrinsic continuity between the two. But what a difference

between the seed and the plant in appearance, in attribute, and in potential! If we presently have the capacity to recognize our loved ones, that ability will be magnified, not lessened, in the immortal state. It is in these extraordinary bodies that we will dwell together with Christ for all eternity in the new earth (Rev. 21:1-22:6). There, we will commune not only with the exalted Christ, but also with all those who are numbered among his children, including our believing loved ones.

Of course, there are many unanswerable questions about our glorified bodies and the life to come. How old will we appear? Will we all be equally strong or smart? How can we possibly be happy without marriage?

But the answer to whether we'll recognize our departed loved ones now residing in heaven is as certain as our assurance of seeing our Savior.

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Appendix 11: A Resurrection That Matters

If we are completely saved from our sins through the Cross, what's the point of the empty tomb?

J. R. Daniel Kirk | posted 4/01/2010 09:56AM

In the spring of my senior year in college, I was deeply immersed in the rhythms of Christian life. I was a leader in InterVarsity, participated regularly in a Bible study with other seminary-bound friends, set my Sundays aside for worship and rest, and read more than my fair share of extracurricular Christian books. As Easter approached, I began rehearsing the importance of Jesus' resurrection. I knew that for Paul and the other New Testament writers, there could be no Christianity without it. Yet one day as I was walking back to my dorm, it dawned on me that the gospel as I understood it had no need for Jesus to be raised from the dead.

The story of salvation as I had learned it was, in its entirety, about the Cross. I would teach other students about the Romans Road to salvation and the Romans 6:23 bridge diagram. What each of these captured beautifully was that we had a sin problem that God overcame with the cross of Christ. But each presentation also omitted the Resurrection entirely. And why not? Once our debt has been paid, what else could we possibly need? What is so important about Easter?

Jesus Holds Human Destiny

The most important thing to say is somewhat shocking at first blush. At his resurrection, Jesus becomes something that he was not before. Jesus becomes the enthroned king of the world—the Messiah. But isn't the Jesus we meet on the pages of the Gospels also the Messiah? Yes and no.

Jesus in the Gospels is like David in the Book of 1 Samuel. He has received God's anointing as the chosen king, but another king is currently on the throne. The story of the Gospels is one in which Jesus inaugurates a new reign of God and deals a deathblow to the imposter king through his death on the cross. If the Cross is the defeat of the old king, the Resurrection is the enthronement of the new. Jesus now literally sits in the space that the kings of Israel had figuratively occupied before him: at the right hand of God. Though the preexistent Christ has always been God's agent in the creation and rule of the world, the human Jesus is now joined to that role as Lord and king over all.

This is the logic behind Jesus' claim in the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18-20). At the Resurrection, Jesus has become the Messiah, the Christ, God's anointed ruler of the earth.

To be God's anointed, the Christ, is to be at least in part the human descendant of David. And so we find Peter, in the first sermon preached after Jesus' resurrection, insisting on three things: (1) During his life on earth, Jesus was a man to whom God testified through wonders and miracles; (2) King David prophesied that the Messiah would be enthroned when God raised him from the dead; and (3) God has, in fact, *made* Jesus both Lord and Messiah by raising him and thereby enthroning him.

Having vanquished the Enemy, who had usurped authority over all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5-8), Jesus reclaims for humanity its original purpose: to rule the world on God's behalf (Gen. 1:26-28).

This is one reason why we find Paul referring to the resurrected Jesus as the second and last Adam. But as the last Adam, Jesus also holds humanity's destiny in his hands.

Intruding on the Present

When we speak of human destiny, we are of course speaking of the future. The New Testament is clear that God has a future for this world, and that the transformation of humans is a crucial component of what lies in store. What are the implications of Jesus being our forerunner in resurrection life? The New Testament leads us to understand that the hopes and expectations of God's people are now hidden in Christ. In other words, the only way to take hold of God's promises for the future is to take hold of the resurrected Jesus in the present.

So, for example, God has promised future embodied life on a new earth. The only way to take hold of this promise is to be joined to the resurrected Lord. Christian hope is more than wishful thinking, because the future on which we have set our hearts has already begun with Jesus' resurrection. He is now what we shall be.

But our present life is also determined by Jesus' resurrection. When we claim that we are even now God's children, that God is growing us up into obedience, and that we are already justified, what we are saying in part is that the future laid up for us in the resurrected Christ is intruding on the present.

Why is it that we Christians can confidently affirm our identity as God's children, members of his family? The short answer is that we have received the Spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:15). But if we continue to probe, we discover that this Spirit is none other than the Spirit who sets Jesus apart as God's Son by raising him from the dead. Jesus' resurrection by the Spirit begins the re-creation of God's family. When we receive the Spirit of sonship, we are receiving the Spirit of Jesus, the resurrected Son of God.

The idea that we are God's children draws us back to Genesis 1. When God creates humans to rule, he creates them to reign in his stead as his beloved children. This is the significance of the language of "image and likeness." So when Jesus reclaims the mantle of lordship over the world, he simultaneously reopens the door into God's family. As we are renewed after the image of the resurrected Son, we are drawn into God's family as God's children and Jesus' sisters and brothers (Rom. 8:29).

As God's children, we are also called to be imitators of our heavenly Father. One of the richest explanations of resurrection that we find in Scripture is the promise that our future resurrection life bears fruit in the present. Jesus' resurrection leads Paul to use turns of phrase such as "walk in newness of life," and "present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead." In the mystery of God's economy, the fact that Jesus' resurrection guarantees our future resurrection means that our present lives already bear signs of the future. God renews us in obedience and sanctification now, but both are foretastes of the life we will know only when we are raised from the dead. That future has begun in the obedience that the Spirit of the resurrected Christ works in us today.

Justification and the Empty Tomb

Somewhat closer to the heart of the gospel, justification is also a function of Jesus' resurrection.

In order to get at this, we need to hold two things together. First, justification is a way of talking about our standing before God's judgment seat. Those who have been justified are those who have been vindicated or acquitted in the judgment. Then we need to see that resurrection was often understood as a gift God would give to those whom he justified. Resurrection is God's reward to the faithful, particularly those who had been faithful to the point of death.

In such a scenario, Jesus' resurrection functions as his justification in the courtroom of God. Jesus was mocked as a would-be king and sentenced to death for claiming to be the man at God's right hand. God

vindicates Jesus' claims, judging him to be faithful and true, by enthroning him at his right hand. Thus, as 1 Timothy 3:16 puts it, Jesus was "vindicated by the Spirit."

So when we proclaim that by faith in Christ we have been justified, we are saying two things about ourselves: (1) God's future word of judgment has been pronounced in the present; and (2) this judgment is a foretaste of our resurrection that we receive now because we participate in Jesus' resurrection. These are a few examples that could be multiplied several times over. When we speak of Jesus' resurrection, we are not talking only about Jesus' present but also about our future and the ways that our future is breaking into the world in which we now live. In between Jesus' present and our future are the lives that play out the drama we will perform with full truth and beauty only when our bodies are raised from death.

Creation with a Future

At a couple of points, we have turned to the creation stories in order to make sense of Jesus' resurrection. This is not a coincidence. Resurrection and new creation are inseparable. The future for which we long and hope is the moment when God recreates this world and populates it with renewed, embodied people. Resurrection tells us that a new creation is coming. The resurrection of Jesus tells us that this new creation has already begun.

We most clearly see the connection between Jesus' resurrection and the coming new creation in Romans 8. There Paul depicts the created order as an active participant in the drama that moves from suffering to resurrection life. Creation groans, says Paul. But these are not the pangs of death, but rather the pangs of new life. Creation groans as it awaits a new birth and the resurrection of God's children. The idea of groaning connects creation to God's people and the Spirit. Paul says that we ourselves groan while we await our adoption as God's children, which is our resurrection. He then goes on to say that the Spirit groans in prayer. These prayers are uttered in accordance with God's desire that we be conformed to the image of his resurrected Son.

Creation's part in the symphony of groaning tells us that the created order has a future in the coming resurrection. But if this creation is groaning for redemption as we ourselves are, then we discover, to the surprise of many, that the fate of this world is not destruction but redemption.

The implications of this are vast. For one, if creation is to be redeemed, then we are not free to view any of our work in this world as just a lot of brass polishing on the *Titanic*. Because Jesus is the last Adam, he and those who are his siblings assume the vocation of the first Adam to rule, subdue, and fill the entire created order. The resurrection of Jesus tells us that God has given up on neither humanity nor the creation we were created to rule on God's behalf. In the mysterious economy of God, what we do here on earth is of eternal consequence.

This plea to work in the present as though it mattered for the future is nothing less than the call to take hold of creation's destiny and bring it to bear on the present. What is true of us is also true of the wider order: the future is already dawning.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul places followers of Jesus within a new creation that has already begun: "... the old has gone, the new has come!" This is the reality brought about by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The old powers have been defeated, the old self has been crucified, and the futility of creation is being undone. A new king is lord, the new self has been raised, and the creation is catching a glimpse of an eternity with hope.

Sent People

There is one more way in which the resurrection of Jesus transforms our understanding of what God has called us to. The resurrected Jesus is the one who has the authority to send us out to the ends of the earth with the assurance that we will not labor in vain.

Matthew is representative of the other Gospels. Only after being raised from the dead can Jesus say, "All authority has been given to me; *therefore, go!*" From his first appearance to Mary in the garden to his last appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus, when the resurrected Jesus appears, he almost always sends. The vocation and mission of the church as a sent people depends on the resurrected Jesus as our sender.

Together with what we have already seen above, resurrection transforms and empowers Christian mission because (1) the Lord of all the earth is the one who sends us; (2) we are scripted into this Lord's resurrection story such that our own lives and futures are mirrors of his; and (3) the breadth of this mission must encompass the entirety of the created order. This is the Good News: not only a story of forgiveness but also a story of power, of transformation, and of hope.

In Flannery O'Connor's short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," the Misfit explains the world-shattering significance of Jesus' resurrection: "He thrown everything off balance. If he did what he said then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow him, and if he didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can."

With these words O'Connor declared, in concert with the New Testament writers, that the Resurrection is everything. Its truth or falsity determines whether the world has been irrevocably shaken by Easter Sunday or whether, instead, God has left Jesus, us, and the entire created order unanswered in our cries for salvation. No less than this is at stake in our affirmation that Jesus is raised from the dead.

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Appendix 12: A Suggested Harmonization of the Resurrection Narratives

1. After the actual resurrection had taken place, but before dawn, an earthquake occurred, an angel rolled away the stone from the entrance of the tomb, and the guards trembled and fled (Matt. 28:2-4).
2. As Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome approached the tomb, intending to anoint Jesus with the perfumed oil brought by other women who evidently set out later (see #7). To their amazement they found the stone rolled away (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1-4; John 20:1).
3. One or more of the women entered the tomb and announced that the body was not there (an inference from John 20:2, where Mary Magdalene does not simply say, "The stone has been taken away").
4. Mary Magdalene immediately returned to tell Peter and John that the body had been removed John 20:2.
5. Mary (the mother of James and Joses) and Salome saw an angel (= "a young man" in Mark) inside the tomb who announced the resurrection and directed the women to tell the disciples that Jesus would meet them in Galilee (Matt. 28: 5-7; Mark 16: 5-7).
6. These two women returned to the city without greeting anyone on the way, for their holy awe rendered them temporarily speechless (Matt.28:8; Mark 16:8).
7. Certain women from Galilee, along with Joanna (cf. Luke 8:3), arrived at the tomb, carrying perfumed oil to anoint the body of Jesus. They met two "men" (= "angels"; cf. Luke 24:4, 23) and then returned to report the angels' message of the resurrection "to the Eleven and to all the rest" (Luke 24:19, 22-23) who have evidently now gathered together (cf. Matt. 26:56).
8. Meanwhile, informed by Mary Magdalene, Peter and John (and others?; Luke 24:24) ran to the tomb without meeting Mary and Salome, observed the grave-clothes, and returned home (John 20:3-10; and Luke 24:12, if this is the correct textual reading).
9. Mary Magdalene followed Peter and John to the Tomb, saw two angels inside, and then met Jesus (John 20:11-17; cf. Mark 16:9).
10. Mary Magdalene returned to inform, the disciples that Jesus had risen (John 20:18; cf. Mark 16:10-11).
11. Mary (the mother of James and Joses) and Salome met Jesus and were directed to tell his brethren to go to Galilee (Matt. 28:9-10).
12. The disciples had now had reports concerning the empty tomb or the resurrection from three sources (viz., Mary Magdalene,

Joanna and the women from Galilee, Mary [and Salome]), but most refused to believe these reports (Luke 24:10-11; cf. Mark 16:11).

13. During the afternoon Jesus appeared to two disciples on the way to Emmaus. They then returned to Jerusalem to report the appearance to the Eleven and others (Luke 24:13-35; cf. Mark 16:12-13).
14. Jesus appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).
15. That evening Jesus appeared to the Eleven and others (Luke 24:33), Thomas being absent (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23; 1 Cor. 15:5; cf. Mark 16:14).
16. One week later Jesus appeared to the Eleven, Thomas being present (John 20:26-29).
17. Seven disciples had an encounter with Jesus by the Sea of Tiberias in Galilee (John 21:1-22).
18. The Eleven met Jesus on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; cf. Mark 16:15-18)
19. Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people (Luke 24:44-49; 1 Cor. 15:6).
20. He appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7).
21. Immediately before his ascension, Jesus appeared to the Eleven near Bethany (Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:6-11; 1 Cor. 15:7; cf. Mark 16:19-20).

Appendix 14: The Age to Come

Question: In Matthew 12:32 it says: Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

When Jesus says, "in the age to come" is he talking about the age that we are in presently, or is the age to come in heaven? I think that the term, "the age to come," usually refers to heaven but that would mean that there is sin and punishment in heaven. What do you think?

Answer: In the parlance of the day, "this age" (sometimes called "this present evil age", Gal. 1:4) referred to the age before Messiah would come, and "the age to come" to the age of the kingdom, when Messiah would rule on earth. All references to the kingdom of heaven being at hand, etc., were references to this coming age. The unusual and unexpected thing was that the Messiah came but did not immediately institute the kingdom or the age to come. He came to die first. His second coming will institute the age to come. However, his coming has introduced aspects of the age to come into the present age (forgiveness and new hearts, as per the promise of Jeremiah 31, the miracles of the coming age [see Heb. 6:5] and the presence of the Holy Spirit). These are foretastes of the coming kingdom, but not the whole banana yet.

Jesus' reference to a person not being forgiven in this age or the age to come doesn't suggest that there will be sin in the kingdom, but rather that the sin of the present, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, will never be forgiven. The penalty will be held against the person now and forever (all of time and eternity can be encompassed in the phrase, this age and the age to come).

Heaven is the present place where God's will is perfectly done, but heaven will come to earth in the ultimate form of the kingdom (Revelation 21,22). There it is represented as the Heavenly Jerusalem. So, eventually, heaven will be on earth, and the age to come will include the millennial kingdom (Revelation 20, the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth) and the eternal form of the kingdom (when Christ gives the kingdom over to the Father, 1 Corinthians 15 25-28).

AskthePastors.wordpress.com, a blog by Randall Johnson

Appendix 15: Types of Messianic Prophecy

Most psalms are not Messianic in the sense that there is a direct reference or prediction to Messiah in them. Rather, they are an indirect prediction in that the immediate reference is to a person who is 'typical' of Messiah, that is, represents or foreshadows the coming Christ.

Typically Messianic Psalms - The subject of the psalm is in some way a type of Christ and his experience is typical of Messiah. What literally happens or happened to him also literally happens or happened to Jesus Christ.

Psalm 41:9, *"Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up heel against me."* Even as David, a type of Christ because he is the king, experienced betrayal from a close companion, so Christ experienced betrayal by Judas, Jn. 13:18,19.

Typico-Prophetically Messianic Psalms - The subject of the psalm is a type of Christ and describes his own experience in terms which were only typically true of Messiah.

Psalm 34:20, speaking of the typically righteous man whose type is fulfilled perfectly in Jesus, *"(the Lord) protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken."* This is spoken in exaggeration of the righteous person (even they get broken bones) but was literally fulfilled in Jesus' experience on the cross, Jn. 19:36.

Indirectly Messianic Psalm - The subject of the psalm is a king in Israel talked about in general terms as to his office.

Psalm 45, a wedding psalm for the king, speaks of his splendor and majesty, his humility and righteousness, his place as God to the people, etc. As **the** king of kings, Jesus embodies all these traits in the ultimate degree.

Eschatologically Yahwistic Psalms - These psalms refer to Yahweh's coming and reigning on the earth sometime in the future. Since this will be fulfilled by Jesus, who is in every sense Yahweh, they must ultimately refer to Him. Psalms 96-99

Purely Prophetic Psalms - A directly intended prophecy of Christ.

Psalm 110, David speaking, *"Yahweh said to my Lord..."*, meaning the Messiah is being addressed by Yahweh. This is the only psalm in the Old Testament that is possibly purely prophetic.

[descriptive titles suggested by Dr. Bruce Waltke]