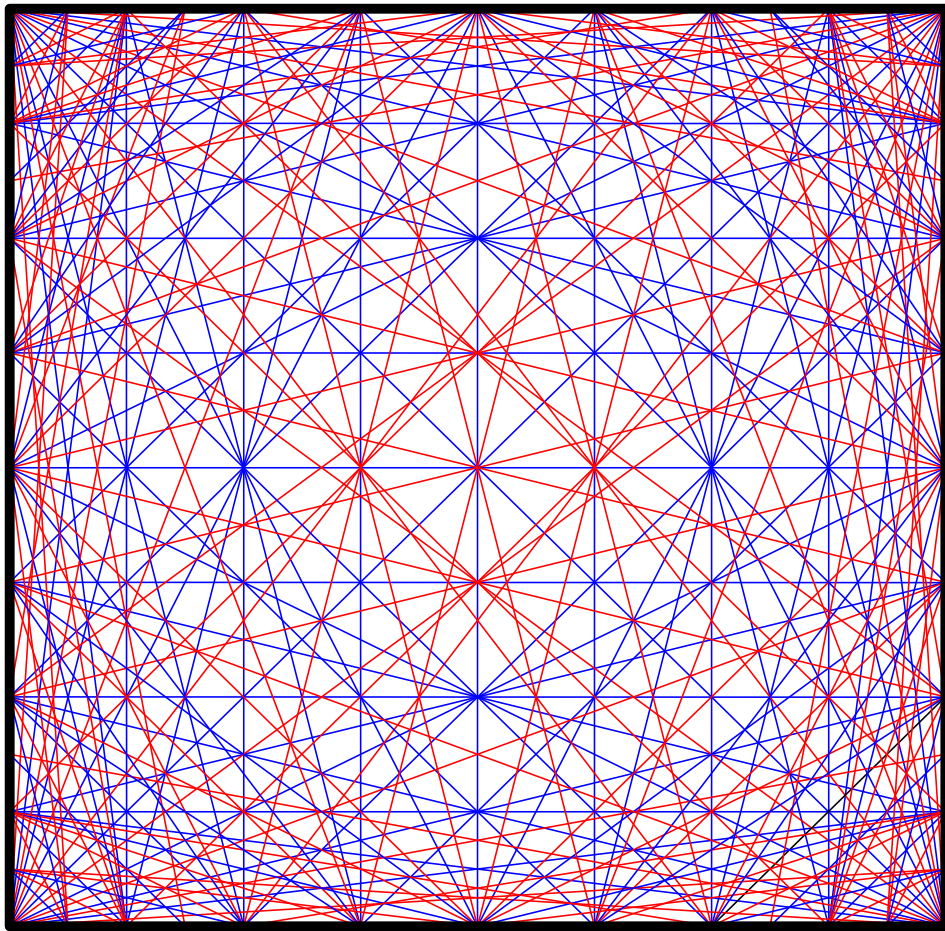


GOD'S PURPOSE AND PLAN



As Told in the Bible

Stuart R. Kerr, III

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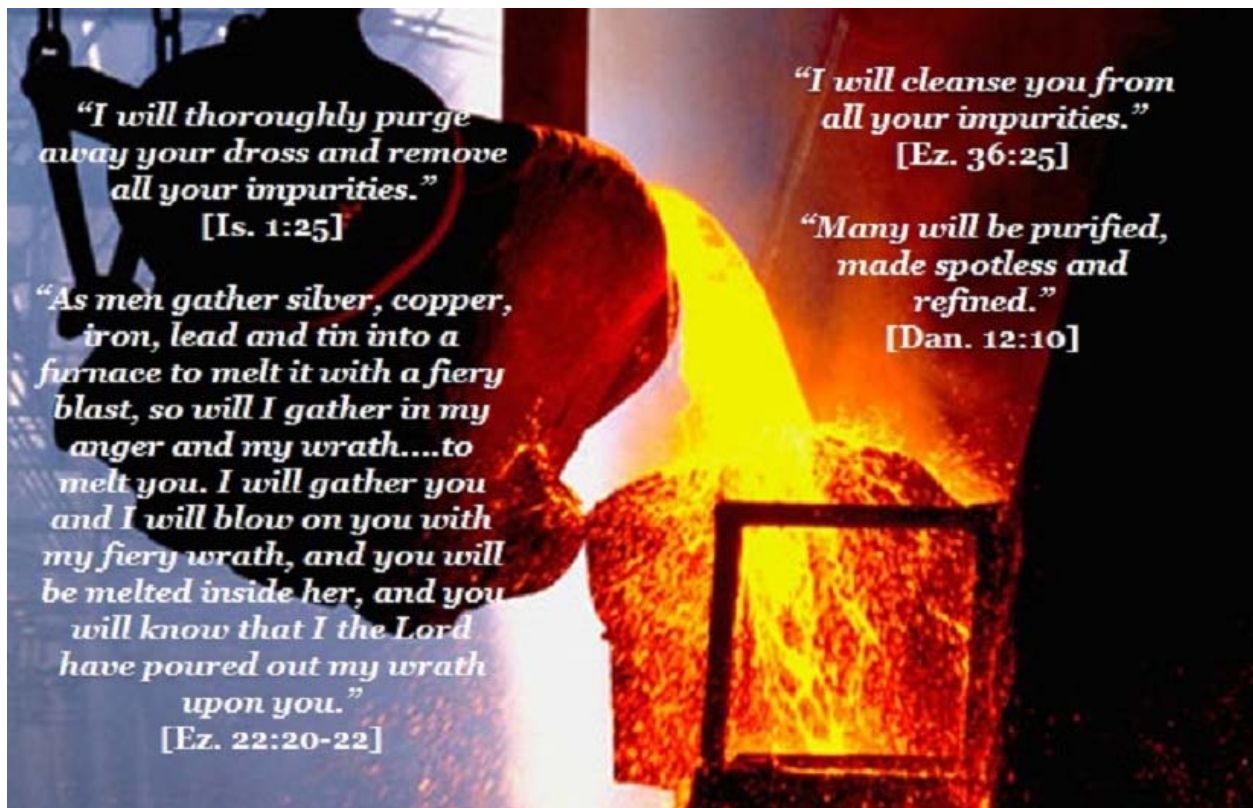
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CHAPTER SEVEN THE LORD'S DISCIPLINE

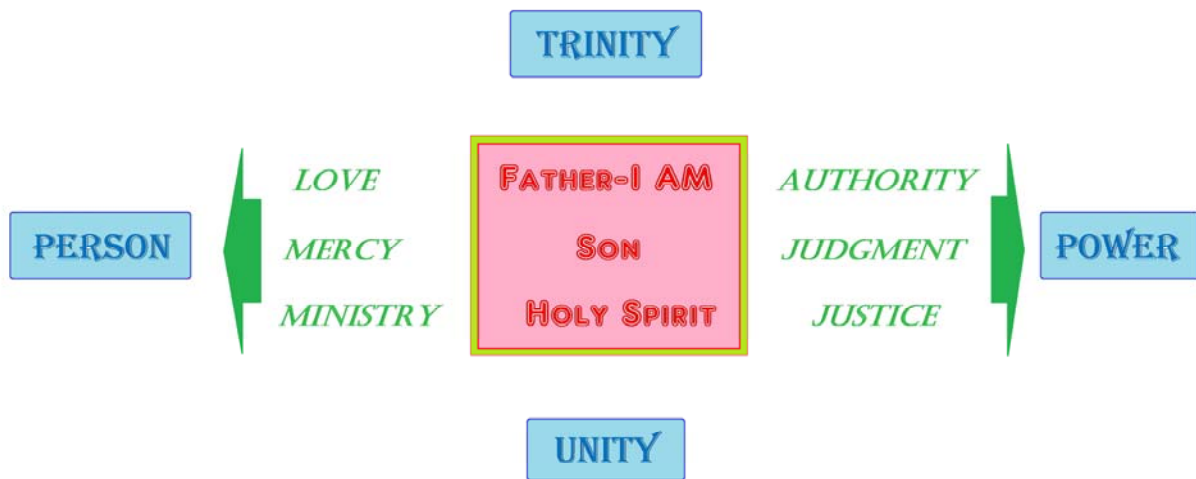
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JUDGMENT, REPENTANCE. AND RESTORATION:

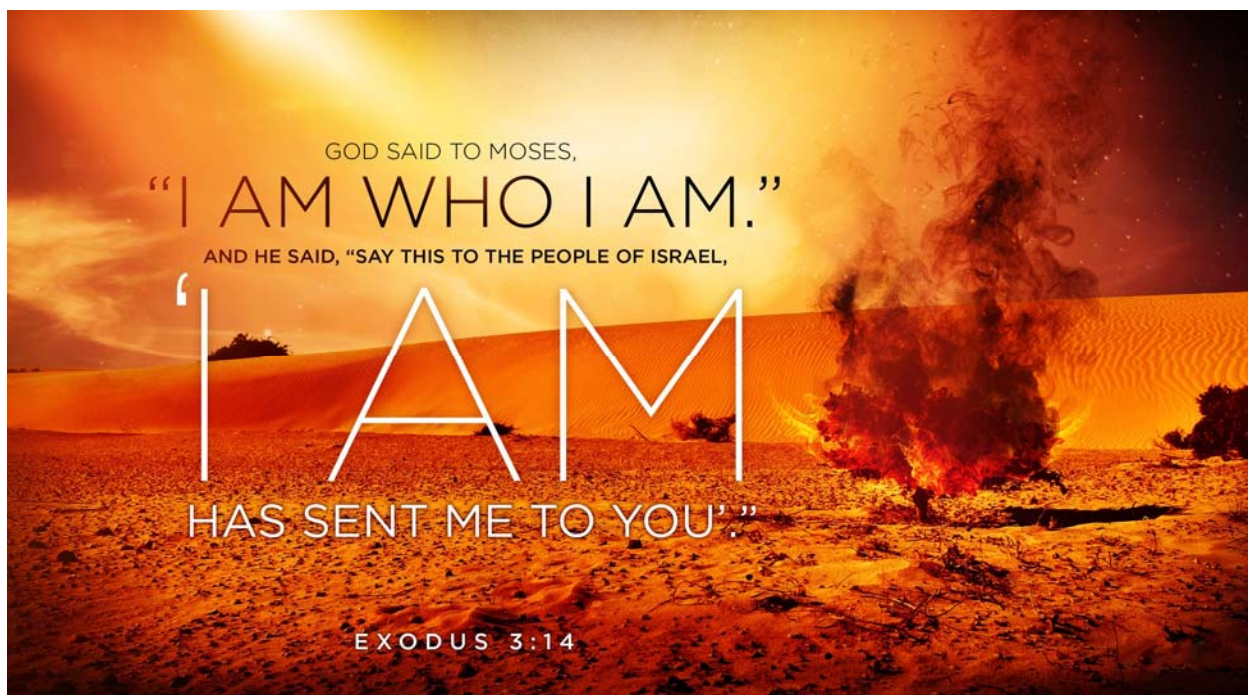


Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.
[Ps. 89:14]

There is a God - one God. God was before his creation. All that "Is" is God and his creation. God was before he created; before he created, all that is was God. God is perfect, therefore in God there is no disunity; in God there is perfect unity. God in himself is perfect in unity. Perfect unity is the condition of perfect oneness in all aspects of existence. God is aware, and awareness is of self and other. God's awareness is of himself and other.

All that is other than God is his creation. God's awareness is of himself and his creation. The realm of existence is comprised, in its entirety, of God and his creation. In the beginning, creation was without form. In that which had no form there was absolutely no formed thing to behold. Simply, "there is". If there is awareness that "there is", then there is one who is aware. If there is one who is aware, then there is self. If there is self, then there is 'I'. If there is 'I', then 'I AM'. 'I AM' is the articulation in God of his awareness of his self as distinct from all other. This is his knowledge of personal existence. 'I AM' is the articulation in God of the awareness he has of his personal existence. Therefore, I AM is the name of God.

In Exodus 3:13 Moses asks God what he should say to the Israelites if they ask him for the name of the God who sent him to them. God first identifies himself using his personal name I AM. His response is "I AM as I AM".



God's Sovereignty

Sovereignty means that God, as the ruler of the Universe, is free and has the right to do whatever he wants. He is not bound or limited by the dictates of his created beings. Further, he is in complete control over everything that happens here on Earth. God's will is the final cause of all things. Sovereignty is often expressed in the language of kingship: God rules and reigns over the entire Universe. He cannot be opposed. He is Lord of heaven and earth. He is enthroned, and his throne is a symbol of his sovereignty. God's will is supreme.

The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.
[Joshua 2:11]

Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom.
[1Chron. 29:11]

The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity.
[Ps. 9:7,8]

The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them.
[Ps. 11:4]

The eternal law of God embodies divine reason as governing the whole universe. God is conceived as the sovereign of his universe. The purpose and plan of his government bears the character of law – this plan is conceived from eternity and not in time, it is said to be the eternal law. This eternal law embraces both spheres of physical and moral law, both have in common the idea of some established norm to be manifested. In physical laws, this norm is fulfilled necessarily, as happens with gravity or the expansion of matter by heat. In moral laws, the norm may or may not be manifested depending on the freewill decision of human beings.

Dominion and awe belong to God; he establishes order in the heights of heaven.
[Job 25:2]

Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress.
[Job 37:22,23]

For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.
[Ps. 22:28]

Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.
[Ps. 45:6]

For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.
[Ps. 47:7,8]

The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength; indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.
[Ps. 93:1]

Judgment will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it.
[Ps. 94:15]

The Lord is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?
[Ps. 113:4-6]

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.
[Ps. 145:13]

***Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.
[Is. 66:1]***



***He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.
[Dan. 7:14]***

Divine law is that foundation which is enacted by God and made known to man through revelation. We distinguish between the “Old Law”, contained in the Pentateuch, and the “New Law”, which was revealed by Jesus Christ and is contained in the New Testament. The divine law of the Old Testament, or the Mosaic Law, is commonly divided into civil, ceremonial, and moral precepts. The civil legislation regulated the relations of the people of God among themselves and with their neighbors; the ceremonial procedures regulated matters of religion, ritual, and the worship of God; moral edicts provide the foundation of a divine code of ethics. It has always been freely admitted by Christians that though the Mosaic Law is an imperfect institution, still Christ came not to destroy it but to fulfil and perfect it.

***But the Lord Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will be proved holy by his righteous acts.
[Is. 5:16]***

***I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.
[Is. 42:6,7]***

Jesus Christ is the advocate of the New Law. He claimed and exercised supreme legislative authority in spiritual matters from the beginning of his public life until his ascension into heaven. In him, the Old Law had its fulfilment and attained its chief purpose. The civil legislation of Moses had the objective to form and preserve a peculiar people for the

worship of the one true God, and to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah who was to be born of the seed of Abraham. The new Kingdom of God founded on Christ was not confined to a single nation; it embraced all the nations of the earth, and when the new Israel was constituted, the old Israel with its separatist law became antiquated; it had fulfilled its mission.

The ceremonial laws of Moses prefigured the more spiritual, and more efficacious sacrifice and sacraments of the New Law, and when these were instituted, the former lost their meaning and value. The death of Christ on the cross sealed the New Covenant, and the Old was abrogated. But until the Gospel had been preached and duly promulgated, out of deference to Jewish prejudices, and out of respect for ordinances which after all were divine, those who wished to do so were at liberty to conform to the practices of the Mosaic Law. When the Gospel had been duly promulgated, the civil and ceremonial precepts of the Law of Moses became ineffectual.

Israel's Transgressions

All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. The Israelites secretly did things against the Lord their God that were not right. From watchtower to fortified city they built themselves high places in all their towns. They set up sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. At every high place they burned incense, as the nations whom the Lord had driven out before them had done. They did wicked things that aroused the Lord's anger. They worshiped idols, though the Lord had said, "You shall not do this."
[2 Kings 17:7-12]

During the eighth century BC, the worship of Yahweh in Israel was in competition with many other cults. The oldest books of the Hebrew Bible reflect this competition, as in the books of Hosea and Nahum, whose authors lament the "apostasy" of the people of Israel, threatening them with the wrath of God if they do not give up their polytheistic cults. Ancient Israelite religion was originally polytheistic; the Israelites worshipped many deities, including El, Baal, Asherah, and Astarte. Yahweh was originally the national god of the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah. As time progressed, the henotheistic cult of Yahweh grew increasingly militant in its opposition to the worship of other gods (henotheism - adherence to one particular god out of several, especially by a family, tribe, or other group). Later, the reforms of King Josiah imposed a form of strict monolatry. Monolatry is belief in the existence of many gods but with the consistent worship of only one deity. Monolatry is distinguished from monotheism, which asserts the existence of only one god, and henotheism, a religious system in which the believer worships one god without denying that others may worship different gods with equal validity.



You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.
[Ex. 2:3-5]

"You shall have no other gods before me" is one of the Ten Commandments found in the Hebrew Bible at Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6. It establishes the nature of the relationship between the nation of Israel and its national god, Yahweh is the god of Israel, and his covenant with the Israelites was initiated by Yahweh after delivering the Israelites from slavery through the plagues of Egypt and the subsequent Exodus. In a general sense, idolatry is the paying of divine honor to any created thing. In ancient times, opportunities to participate in the honor or worship of other deities abounded. However, according to the Book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites were strictly warned to neither adopt nor adapt any of the religious practices of the peoples around them. Nevertheless, the story of the people of Israel until the Babylonian Captivity is the story of the violation of the first commandment by the worship of "foreign gods" and its consequences.

Much of biblical preaching from the time of Moses to the exile is predicated on the either-or choice between exclusive worship of God and false gods. The Babylonian exile seems to have been a turning point after which the Jewish people as a whole were strongly monotheistic and willing to fight battles (such as the Maccabean Revolt) and face martyrdom before paying homage to any other god.

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.

[Deut. 13:1-4]

They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to false gods, which are not God—gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your ancestors did not fear.

[Deut. 32:16,17]

Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

[Josh. 24:19,20]

I [Elijah] have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.

[1Kings 19:14]

Israel eventually moved from the rampant polytheism of Solomon's time back toward monotheism during which period a series of prophets had cried out for exclusive devotion to Yahweh. Although not denying the existence of other gods, they all insisted that the Israelites worship only Yahweh. In 586 B.C., when many Israelites were exiled to Babylon after conquest by the Babylonian Empire, Isaiah reports Yahweh unequivocally saying, “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.” [Is. 44:6] Israel was moving towards an exclusive monotheism.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[Deut. 6:4]

Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior.

[Is. 43:10,11]

With whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?

[Is. 46:5]

The house of Israel and the house of Judah had broken God's covenant which he made with their fathers; Israel broke the covenant of the law by their idolatrous worship. Such worship is against the first five commandments of the law. Israel broke the covenant also by their evil conduct. Such conduct was against the last five of the commandments of the law. By their conduct and behavior in their daily living, Israel absolutely broke the commandments concerning murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting. Thus, by their idolatrous worship and by their evil conduct, they completely annulled the law. As far as they were concerned, the law was of no effect. Although God's intention in giving Israel his law was to test and expose them, he still needed to punish them for the sake of his righteousness and holiness. Holiness refers to God's nature, and righteousness, to God's

acts. Because of their unfaithfulness and their evil conduct, God had to punish Israel. His holiness and righteousness required this punishment.

Prophets arose in Israel during the period when Israel's kings challenged God's sovereign authority. Most of the prophets criticized the direction in which the people were being led by their rulers, and this often got them into trouble. They were met with hostility, ridicule, mistreatment, punishment, and exile. The word prophet means "to speak for." The prophets spoke for God to the people, receiving God's message through visions, dreams, and ecstasies. The prophetic message varied with the circumstances. The prophets warned the people about impending doom if they did not change their ways. When things were going badly, they supported the people with words of encouragement and hope.

Elijah was an early prophet whose narratives are recorded in the last part of First Kings and the first part of Second Kings. We know very little of what he said, but we are told stories of wonders that he performed, including the prediction of a drought and the multiplication of food. In one amazing story, Elijah won a contest against the 450 prophets of the god Baal and proceeded to kill them all. At the end of his life, Elijah was taken up in a fiery chariot, leaving his mantle and power to his successor, Elisha. To this very day, at every celebration of the Passover, the Jews look for the return of Elijah, whom they consider to be the greatest of the prophets. It was in that role as greatest of the prophets that Elijah appeared at the Transfiguration of Jesus.

Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.
[1Kings 18:21]

Amos was a shepherd from the town of Tekoa in Judah, the southern kingdom. He insisted that he was not a professional prophet. In the middle of the eighth century BC, he felt called by God to prophesy in Israel, the northern kingdom. The message Amos gave there was disagreeable to Israel's ruling powers. He identified all of Israel's neighbors as being under God's care and subject to God's punishment. His harshest words, however, were aimed at Israel itself, specifically its royalty and aristocracy. Amos condemned these elite for enriching themselves at the expense of the poor, and he made it clear that they were doomed, with no chance of avoiding disaster. His message was more than the ruling class could bear, and he was forced to leave the religious center of Bethel and return to the south. But by then Amos had changed the direction of the prophetic discussion of justice and righteousness, from focusing on God's dealings with the people to the people's dealings with each other. The heart of Amos' message is: "Let justice roll down like water."

You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.
[Amos 3:2]

The Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament gets its name from a prophet who lived and worked in Jerusalem before the Exile, but that prophet did not write everything that is in the Book of Isaiah. His prophetic teachings are included in the first 39 chapters. The writings of another

prophet, whom we call Second Isaiah, are in chapters 40–55. The teachings of yet another prophet, whom we call Third Isaiah, are found in the rest of the book. Second Isaiah dealt with the horrible experience of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of most of the people to Babylon. These events seemed to contradict the Exodus experience and God's covenant with Israel, through which they had been given their land. In the process of trying to help them keep their hope and trust in God alive, Second Isaiah developed a beautiful theology of divine providence. Mixed in with the prophecies of Second Isaiah is a collection of oracles about the Suffering Servant, passages which have become familiar to us as part of the liturgies of Holy Week.

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!
[Is. 30:18]

Jeremiah was born of a priestly family in the middle of the seventh century BC. He supported the efforts of King Josiah to restore the worship of the true God, but when idolatry returned after Josiah's death, Jeremiah was so critical of the people that he was arrested, imprisoned, and publicly disgraced. After the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and exiled the king, Jeremiah tried to steer the new king in a moderate direction, but his efforts failed. Nebuchadnezzar returned in 587 to completely destroy Jerusalem. Jeremiah was taken to Egypt against his will; he prophesied from there. Jeremiah made important contributions to the Israelite understanding of repentance, justice, and prophecy. He is most remembered for his prophesy of "a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." Furthermore, God told Jeremiah that "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" and "they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, for I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:33,34).

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.
[Jer. 29:13,14]

Ezekiel was a priest in the Temple in Jerusalem. He was probably taken to Babylon in 597 BC with the first group of exiles when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem. The Book of Ezekiel records what happened four years later. Ezekiel was living in a village in Babylon when he received his call to be a prophet. He prophesied to the exiles that the Temple would be destroyed because of the idolatry of the Jews before the exile. In 587 BC the Babylonians did indeed destroy the Temple. As a prophet, Ezekiel spoke words of condemnation and challenge, but he also spoke words of consolation. He promised salvation for those in exile who would change their lives.

As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the

nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land.
[Ez. 34:12,13]

The Wrath of God

Wrath is defined as “the emotional response to perceived wrong and injustice,” often translated as “anger,” “indignation,” “vexation,” or “irritation.” Both humans and God express wrath. But there is vast difference between the wrath of God and the wrath of man. God’s wrath is holy and always justified; man’s is never holy and rarely justified.

In the Old Testament, the wrath of God is a divine response to human sin and disobedience. Idolatry was most often the occasion for divine wrath. Psalm 78:56-66 describes Israel’s idolatry. The wrath of God is consistently directed towards those who do not follow his will (Deuteronomy 1:26-46; Joshua 7:1; Psalm 2:1-6). The Old Testament prophets often wrote of a day in the future, the “day of wrath” (Zephaniah 1:14-15). God’s reported wrath against sin and disobedience is perfectly justified because his plan for mankind is holy and perfect, just as God himself is holy and perfect. God provides a way to gain divine favor – repentance - which turns God’s wrath away from the sinner. To reject that perfect plan is to reject God’s love, mercy, grace and favor and to therefor incur his righteous wrath.

But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it.
[Lev. 26:14-16]

If you remain hostile toward me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.
[Lev. 26:21,22]

I will carry out great vengeance on them and punish them in my wrath. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I take vengeance on them.
[Ez. 25:17]

When the Lord could no longer endure your wicked actions and the detestable things you did, your land became a curse and a desolate waste without inhabitants, as it is today.
[Jer. 44:22]

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

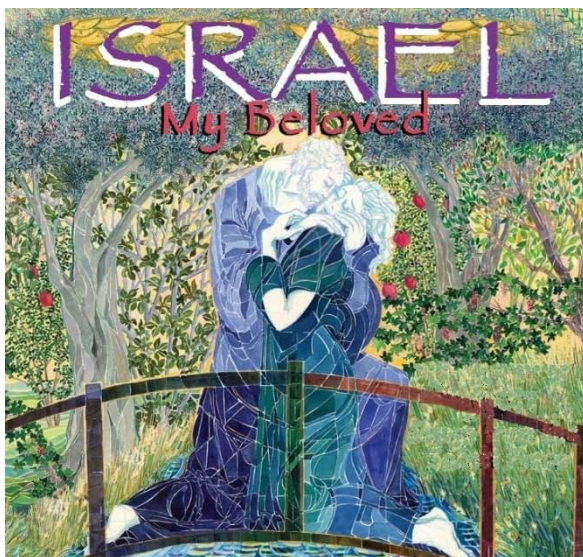
[Nahum 1:2]

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

[Rom. 1:18,19]

In Exodus 32:34, God gives Moses a sober warning concerning Israel's sin in their worshipping the golden calf - a day will come when he visits Israel for judgment: "However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." This verse summarizes how God will deal with Israel and the nations. He personally brought the nation of Israel up out of Egypt with unequalled signs and wonders. In the desert, his presence came down and shook Mount Sinai in the presence of all the people. He spoke audibly to a nation and made covenant with them. It was so tender to God that he refers to this period of time as they day He "betrothed" or "married" Israel in the wilderness (Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 2:15).

After all that happened, while Moses was meeting with God, Israel formed and fashioned an idol, a golden calf. The nation then worshipped this idol and gave affection to it - going so far as to give this idol credit for delivering them from Egypt. Israel was committing the great sin of all men. From God's perspective, he had just made a marriage covenant with Israel (Jeremiah 2:1) and Israel was committing adultery while she was still on the honeymoon. Israel's sin was agonizing and deeply personal to Yahweh. They rejected the creator and worshipped a god of their own making rather than keep their marriage covenant with him. He had joined himself to the nation, but Israel gave herself to adultery right after her deliverance.



I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown... What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.
[Jer. 2:1,5]

To be true to himself, Yahweh had to judge Israel's adultery. Yahweh spoke to Moses; even though these Israelites had rejected Him, Yahweh would continue to go before the nation to

secure their promised inheritance. The nation had received mercy. Their sin was so great that God's presence would remain distant (Exodus 32:34; 33:2-3), but he would fulfill his promises to them (Exodus 32:34; 33:2).

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

[Deut. 7:9]

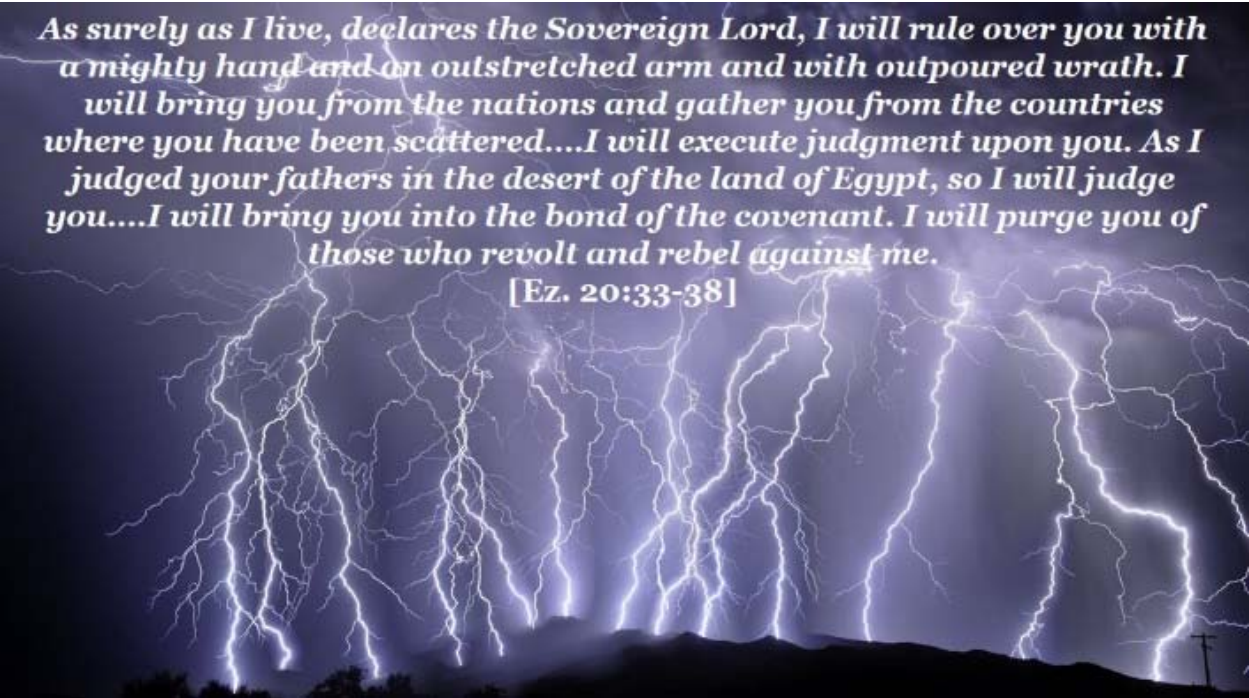
The day of judgment would surely come, but it would be a later day. A day would come, in the final years of this age, when God would visit Israel in a final punishment for all her sins. It will be Israel's most severe hour of punishment (Jeremiah 30:7; Ezekiel 5:8, 9, 14), but also the final end of her punishment. It will be unequalled but also brief and after this he will transform her into the most glorious nation on the earth. God is always true to himself; he cannot simply "overlook" sin, which is nothing less than rebellion against his sovereign authority.

They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the Lord had ordered them, 'Do not do as they do,' and they did the things the Lord had forbidden them to do.... So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left.

[2Kings 17:15,18]

I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did.

[Judges 2:21,22]



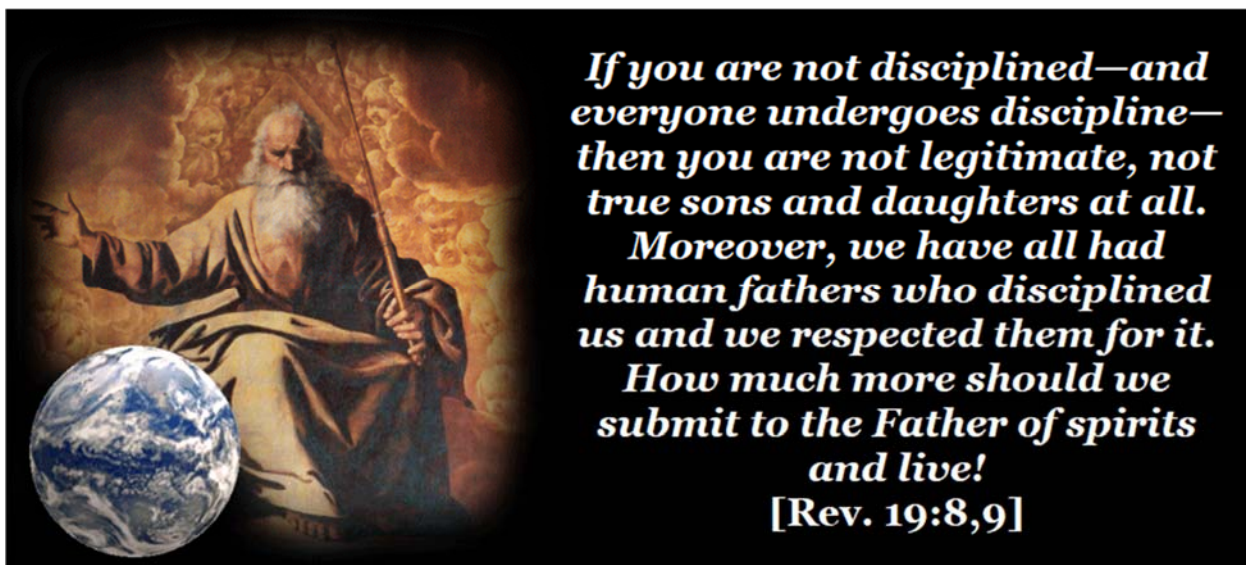
As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I will rule over you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered....I will execute judgment upon you. As I judged your fathers in the desert of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you....I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me.
[Ez. 20:33-38]

The wrath of God is a fearsome and terrifying thing. Only those who have been covered by the supreme sacrifice of Christ on the cross can be assured that God's wrath will never fall on them.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!
[Rom. 5:8,9]

God's Discipline

When the Bible speaks of God's judgment upon his enemies, it is referring to the misery that he brings upon them, not for any purifying or restoring or rehabilitating purposes, but solely to express his holy justice; his retribution, not restitution. His righteous judgment is applied purely on the basis precisely of what God's enemies deserve. It is not to demonstrate mercy; it is to demonstrate righteousness and justice. The book of Revelation further bolsters this view, for God's retributive justice against his enemies is not temporary nor is it for the purpose of them becoming holy: "Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments." [Rev. 19:1,2] In contrast, the pain that comes from discipline is not retributive, it's temporary, and is intended to improve those whom God calls children.



God has always called his people to come out of the world and to be “consecrated”, to be separate. In ancient Israel, from the days of Abraham, circumcision was a sign of God’s special covenant with his people. At the Exodus from Egypt God reminded them, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Truly, they were God’s treasured people, the object of his gracious blessings. But every generation from Egypt to Ezekiel had rebelled against the Lord (Ezek. 20). Each time, God had resolved to pour out his wrath upon them, to annihilate them. That is what they deserved. Yet he spared them, for his name’s sake, and did not cause their annihilation. Instead he chose to discipline them, as a father disciplines the child whom he loves (Heb. 12:5; Prov. 3:11-12). The wilderness wandering is an example of God’s discipline of the generation who rebelled and would not trust the Lord to give them the land that he had promised them. During the days of Ezekiel, God is using the nation of Babylon to discipline them; Ezekiel 21-22 describe the circumstances. Israel had done wrong and she was being disciplined. She deserved annihilation; she received the grace of discipline that she might receive life.

God sent the Israelites into captivity because they disobeyed the Lord and served other Gods. Through this discipline, the Jewish nation learned to only worship God. Likewise, God may punish us for our sins, but it is always a call to repent and return to him. After the Israelites entered into the promised land, they did not obey God as they should. For a few centuries there was no king. ‘Everyone did what was right in his own eyes’ (Judges 21:25), instead of seeking the will of God. After that, God gave kings to Israel, but many of them did not serve the Lord; idolatry was rampant. God sent prophets, but most often the people did not repent and return to him. The depth of depravity was reached during the reign of king Manasseh. He erected altars to false Gods, sacrificed his own sons in the fire and put an idol in the temple in Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 21:3-7). So finally, God did what he had said even before the Israelites were in Israel: they were taken captive and led to another country - Babylon. This happened in three waves.

In the first wave of 605 BC, the Babylonians first gained power in Judah (2Kings 24:1). Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, captured it, and took some of the most important people, among whom was the prophet Daniel, captive to Babylon (see Daniel 1:1-7). The second wave happened after Judah rebelled against the Babylonians. In 597 BC, Jerusalem was conquered a second time by the army of Nebuchadnezzar. This time, over 10,000 men were taken as captives to Babylon: officials, soldiers, and craftsmen (2Kings 24:10-17). The third wave happened in the year 586 BC, after another Judean rebellion was crushed by Nebuchadnezzar. This time, he set fire to the city of Jerusalem, and he destroyed the temple. The remaining Judeans were taken into exile to Babylon (2Kings 25:1-21).

Between the second and the third wave, Jeremiah prophesied that the total time of captivity would be 70 years (Jer. 29:10). On the one hand, this emphasized how serious the sin of Israel was. They would not be saved after a few years, as they expected. On the other hand, it showed God's grace. For he promised to not forget them, but to save them in the end; and he did. The Persians took over the Babylonian Empire and released the Jews. As Jeremiah had prophesied, 70 years after the first captivity, the first returnees arrived in Israel.

The captivity for once and for all cured the Jews of their sin of idolatry. Never again would they bow before other gods. The hard punishment that the Lord gave them for forsaking him, resulted in their repentance. It has been offered that the discipline of the Lord is a blessing that should be embraced, that although he may bruise, it is only for a season because he will then bind up the wounds of his people [Job 5:17,18]. This expression is much in concert with similar Bible teachings. Divine discipline is a mark of our Creator's love for his people.

God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.
[Ex. 20:20]

The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.
[Deut. 13:3]

Blessed is the man who God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty, for he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.
[Job 5:17,18]

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline - then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.
[Heb. 12:7,8,10]

Discipline, then, is how God lovingly turns his children from rebellion to obedience. Through discipline, our eyes are opened more clearly to God's perspective on our lives. As King David stated in Psalm 32, discipline causes us to confess and repent of sin we have not yet dealt with. In this way, discipline is cleansing. It is also a growth catalyst. The more we know about God, the more we know about his desires for our lives. Discipline presents us with the opportunity to learn and to conform ourselves to the image of Christ



***My son, do not despise the
Lord's discipline and do not
resent his rebuke, because
the Lord disciplines those he
loves, as a father the son he
delights in.
[Prov. 3:11,12]***

***He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to
discipline him.
[Prov. 13:24]***

***Stern discipline awaits him who leaves the path.
[Prov. 15:10]***

***Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he
will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.
[Prov. 23:13,14]***

As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"

[Ez. 33:11]

You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your sins.

[Amos 3:2]

Those whom I [Jesus] love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.

[Rev. 3:19]

God's Grace and Mercy



Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

[Micah 7:18,19]

Grace means to get something that you do not deserve; unmerited favor. Mercy means you do not get a punishment that you deserve; compassion, forbearance. God is abundant in grace and mercy and we can read about it in the Bible. His greatest act of grace is the gift of salvation that is available for all people through faith (Eph 2:8-9). When the gift is accepted, eternal life is promised to the recipient. This eternal life is a promise of a home one day in heaven with God. The promise to the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that one day Jesus the Christ will return to earth to claim his purchased possession (Eph 1:12-14; 4:30). Jesus purchased every sinner with his own sacrifice on the cross at Calvary.

The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

[Ps. 145:9]

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

[Ps. 103:2-5]

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

[Ps. 103:8-10]

If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

[Ps. 130:3,4]

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever.

[Ps. 136:1]

In theology, two kinds of grace are often distinguished. Common grace is defined as God's grace given to all humanity regardless of their response to him. This can include the beauty of creation, the provision of food and other essentials, and every good thing that happens to a person regardless of whether the person is a believer or unbeliever. Saving grace is grace from God that provides salvation to a person. This is the grace described in Ephesians 2:8-9 that states, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

[Ex. 33:19]

For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath.

[Deut. 4:31]

Both perfect mercy and perfect grace are found in Jesus Christ. Through his sacrifice on the cross, he has provided a way of escape or mercy from the consequences of sin (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). God has extended grace by providing salvation and proclaiming salvation to us through the Son, his teaching in Scripture, and through the Spirit of God at work among us. Hebrews 4:16 blends these two ideas in one powerful statement, teaching, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Our only rightful response is to accept both God's mercy and his grace and accept the eternal life he offers through Jesus Christ. Through this salvation, we receive the mercy of forgiven sin and the grace of life in Christ, including eternity with him. Jesus has come to give us life, and life abundantly (John 10:10).

God's grace and mercy can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. Grace on one side gives us what we do not deserve; mercy on the other does not give us what we do deserve. Grace, often defined as unmerited favor, is offered freely by God "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). It is offered to us only through faith in Christ so that we may clearly understand that it is not obtainable by any adherence to the law. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The law is

holy, just, and good (Romans 7:12), but unfortunately it magnifies our sin and shows us how far we are from reaching the perfect standard of our holy and righteous Creator. Thankfully God's amazing grace overpowers our magnified sin, as it "transcends" above our transgressions. "But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." (Romans 5:20)

God is also rich in his mercy toward us (Eph. 2:4), as he extends his loving compassion to us despite our sinful condition. Our salvation is rooted in God's mercy, as he "has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Grace and mercy are glorious gifts from God that should take us to our knees in worship and adoration. We can bring absolutely nothing to God except a humble and thankful heart as we trust not in our works, but solely in the finished work of Jesus Christ at Calvary. "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy" (Titus 3:5). This Mercy is the result and effect of God's goodness. It is the great design of Scripture to represent God as merciful. This is a divine feature that draws sinners to seek him. The Lord is merciful, gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness. But one must acknowledge that the good Lord in his patience must necessarily set forth his justice: "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty." (Ex. 34:7)

The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.
[Nahum 1:3]

Mercy stays the speedy execution of God's justice. Mercy gets a reprieve for the sinner and stops the speedy process of justice. God would, by his goodness, lead sinners to repentance. Yet such is God's goodness, that he rejoices at the salvation of sinners, and is glad when his mercy is accepted. When the prodigal son came home, the father was glad and made a feast to express his joy; so, God rejoices when a poor sinner comes in, and lays hold of his mercy.

But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.
[Neh. 9:31]

Surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their wicked ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?
[Ez. 33:11]

Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.
[Lam. 3:33]

Israel's Restoration

But if a wicked person turns away from all the sins they have committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, that person will surely live; they will not die. None of the offenses they have committed will be remembered against them. Because of the righteous things they have done, they will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?.. If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die... Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!
[Ez. 18:21-23, 26-28, 30-32]

The Babylonian captivity or exile refers to the time period in Israel's history when Jews were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. It is an important period of biblical history because both the exile and the return and restoration of the Jewish nation were fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies. God used Babylon as his agent of judgment against Israel for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against Him. There were actually several different times during this period (607-586 B.C.) when the Jews were taken captive by Babylon. With each successive rebellion against Babylonian rule, Nebuchadnezzar would lead his armies against Judah until they laid siege to Jerusalem for over a year, killing many people and destroying the Jewish temple, taking captive many thousands of Jews, and leaving Jerusalem in ruins.

The Bible provides little information about the years in the sixth century B.C. when many of the Israelite people lived in exile in Babylonia. Though the people could no longer worship God in the temple in Jerusalem, the Babylonians allowed them to gather and practice their religion. The Israelites told the stories of their ancestors, heard the words of prophets, and studied the Law of Moses. Some believe that it was during the time of the exile that some of Israel's priests added to the old Scriptures and wrote new ones, so the people would not forget who they were and where they came from.

Just as the prophet Jeremiah had warned, the city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. Jerusalem was destroyed under an officer of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan, along with the complete destruction of the temple built by Solomon. Like the Assyrians, the Babylonians took the influential people of conquered nations as prisoners. The Hebrew captives enjoyed freedom of movement in the land of Babylon. The captives were also employed. Nebuchadnezzar had taken craftsmen and artisans, particularly in the captivity of

597 B.C. (2Kings 24:14-16). Judah became a province of Babylon. There was no longer a king, but a governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) ruled 43 years and maintained his country's empire as long as he lived. Those who succeeded him could not hold what he had conquered. Under their rule, the country decayed only lasting another 23 years after Nebuchadnezzar. None of Nebuchadnezzar's successors could maintain what he established, resulting in Babylon's decline. In Daniel chapter 5, a Babylonian king by the name of Belshazzar mocks God by throwing a party with articles taken from the Jewish temple. God passes judgment on Belshazzar by taking away his kingdom and dividing it between the Medes and Persians.

Persia's rise to power under Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC) was climaxed by the conquest of Babylonia. Nearly 160 years before king Cyrus was even born, God declared to the prophet Isaiah that he would raise up this man, a shepherd, to rebuild his city. Even though at the time of Isaiah, Jerusalem was prospering and would not be destroyed for another 100 years by Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. The first return to Judah for the Jews came shortly after the Persian conquest of Babylon, 538 BC (Ezra 1:1), led by Sheshbazzar. The second came 80 years later, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, 458 BC (Ezra 7:7), led by Ezra. And the third came 13 years after the second, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I, 444 BC (Neh. 2:1), led by Nehemiah. The tolerant attitude of Cyrus toward his subjects included permission for people, who had been deported by Babylon, to return to their home-lands.

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

[Is. 49:6]

Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name.

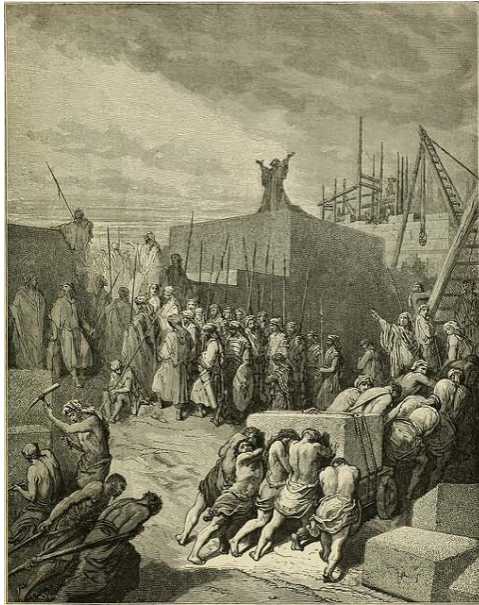
[Ez. 39:25]

I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.

[Jer.32:37-41]

Cyrus' edict is recorded twice in Scripture: Ezra 1:2-4 and Ezra 6:3-5. They give orders that the Jerusalem temple be rebuilt, with the cost defrayed from Cyrus' own treasury; that certain specifications be met in this rebuilding; that all Jews who wished could return to their homeland, with those Jews who remained in Babylon being urged to assist with financial

contribution; and that the gold and silver vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar be returned to Jerusalem.



For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

[Ez. 36:24-28]

A prime order of business on arriving in the homeland was the rebuilding of the temple. Construction on the temple did begin soon after arrival in the land. Ezra 3:8 states that the people were led in by Zerubbabel and Joshua (Jeshua), the high priest, though apparently Sheshbazzar was in charge (Ezra 5:16). They first erected the altar and rein-stated the prescribed sacrifices. Later, in the second month of the second year, they commenced work on the temple. The first step was laying the foundation; when it was completed, the people celebrated. Many rejoiced, but others, who could remember the glory of the former Solomonic Temple, wept openly (Ezra 3:8-12). They could see that the new temple would be more modest than the former.

At this point, opposition from Samaritans to the north began (Ezra 4:1-5). Besides this outside interference, the Jewish workers on the temple began to use more of their time for rebuilding their own houses and farming their own lands (Hag. 1:3-11). It was not long before all work ceased, with the result that the temple remained little more than a foundation until the second year of Darius I, 520 BC (Hag. 1:1), some 16 years later. In Darius's second year, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged that building operations be resumed. They addressed both the people in general and Zerubbabel and Joshua, who were still in command. Their prophetic efforts were fruitful, and work did begin in the sixth month of the year (Hag. 1:15; Ezra 5:1-2). Four years later, in the sixth year of Darius I, 515 BC (Ezra 6:15), the temple was completed.

Two religious issues were most important to the people who had returned from exile: (1) worship of the God of Israel in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and (2) study of the Law of Moses to see how God's people were to live in the present situation. Also, in this period, Nehemiah served for a time as governor of Judea and helped supervise the rebuilding of

Jerusalem's walls. Though the people had the freedom to worship as they wished, their land was still under control of the Persians.

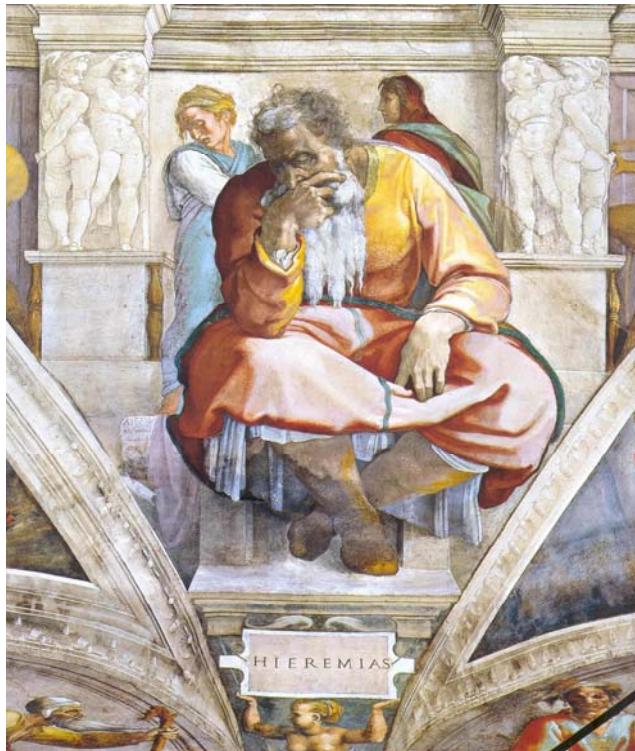
While some of the Jewish people were settling back in Jerusalem, others stayed in the lands ruled by Persia or moved on to other major cities in the eastern Mediterranean world. Some of these groups developed their own collections of the Jewish Scriptures and their own methods of interpreting them. Jewish groups also appeared in Syria and Asia Minor, in North Africa, and on islands in the Mediterranean. Many Jewish writings of the period after the exile come from Alexandria in Egypt, where Jewish teachers read their Scriptures along with Greek philosophy. These teachers believed that this approach would help people to understand the basic truths of the Bible.

The Babylonian captivity had one very significant impact on the nation of Israel when it returned to the land - it would never again be corrupted by the idolatry and false gods of the surrounding nations. A revival among Jews took place after the return of the Jews to Israel and the rebuilding of the temple. We see those accounts in Ezra and Nehemiah as the nation would once again return to the God who had delivered them from their enemies. Just as God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah, God judged the Babylonians for their sins, and the Babylonian Empire fell to the armies of Persia in 539 B.C., once again proving God's promises to be true.

JEREMIAH'S COMPLAINT:

Jeremiah lived in troubling times as he paid witness to the downward decline of the nation of Judah. Jeremiah was God's prophet at the time when Judah was about to suffer military defeat and subsequent captivity. He was the last of God's major prophets. He was commissioned to appeal to the Judeans before their civilization came to an end. Jeremiah had to tell the people that God was going to destroy the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, and they were going to be either killed or exiled. At first the people laughed at him. When it started to come true, they turned against him and tried to kill him.

God called Jeremiah to be a prophet to Jerusalem. God tells him that this is what he had planned for Jeremiah even before he was born. Jeremiah thought he was too young and didn't know how to speak in public:



The word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” “Alas, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.
[Jer. 1:4-8]

Still, the word of the Lord was like a fire burning inside him he could not shut his mouth and not deliver the message. Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed God's messages for more than 40 years:

But if I say, “I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.
[Jer. 20:9]

Jeremiah's complaint is focused on the withering of the herbs, the disappearance of the animals and the people of the land turning to evil. Sooner or later, though, their sins and crimes catch up to them, and divine justice follows. God responds to Jeremiah by asserting that the worst is yet to come. God reminds him that he is living in turbulent ones. When God ceases the protection of his people, terrible things will ensue. The prophet experiences a major personal crisis as Judah's king and people suffered, and this ailment of the spirit threatened his efficacy as God's prophet. Jeremiah falls into a deep depression while the people all around him begin to condemn him for his foreboding prophesies.



“Alas, Sovereign Lord! How completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, ‘You will have peace,’ when the sword is at our throats!”

[Jer. 4:10]

“Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry.”

[Jer.4:19]

These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the Lord, the requirements of their God.

[Jer. 5:4]

But I am filled with the wrath of the Lord, and I cannot hold it in.

[Jer. 6:11]

Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me... Oh that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.

[Jer. 8:21, 9:1]

Woe to me because of my injury! My wound is incurable! Yet I said to myself, ‘This is my sickness, and I must endure it... Correct me, Lord, but only with justice – not in your anger lest you reduce me to nothing,’

[Jer. 10:19,24]

Jeremiah feels alone and isolated, heavily burdened with foretelling a frightening future for Judah. God assures him that he is not alone. Even though God remains threateningly stern, he offers Jeremiah a ray of hope, promising Jeremiah that he will provide a remnant of the people survival from the siege and the destruction of Judah. By God's use of the term "your remnant," God indicates that this group will be Jeremiah's own.

Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose; surely I will make your enemies plead with you in times of disaster and times of distress.

[Jer. 15:11]

I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the Lord's wrath... Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer... Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail... Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.

[Lam. 3:1,8,21,22,32,33]

Still, Jeremiah is not satisfied with God's assurances and attempts to express the depth of his dejection and the seriousness of his crises of belief. Jeremiah reminds God that he has often rejoiced in God's word and called on his name, yet his pain is ongoing, and he can find no rest. Jeremiah is experiencing intense spiritual doubt. God warns Jeremiah that he must abandon his mistaken tone of distrust and despair. He will restore him as his prophet, the "mouth" of God, only when he learns the difference between the way of God and the way of the wicked. God demands a servant in whom he can have confidence, one who will pronounce warnings in the face of persecution and who will remain committed to carrying out his work to its conclusion no matter where that work may take him. God needs an individual of resolute and indefatigable faith.

Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them.

[Jer. 1:17]

They did not listen, and they did not repent. Instead, they were subjected to war and a surviving remnant was exiled into captivity. These people had made a covenant with God and had been taught by God's prophets. God had promised to protect and bless his people, but the people had to promise in return to be faithful and obedient to God and to keep his commandments given in the Law of Moses. The temple had become a physical expression of the covenant between God and the people. In Jeremiah's time, the people counted on the promises of God protection, but they forgot about their own obligations under the covenant to obey the Law. Jeremiah foretells 70 Years of exile

They will die of deadly diseases. They will not be mourned or buried but will be like dung lying on the ground. They will perish by sword and famine, and their dead bodies will become food for the birds and the wild animals.

[Jer. 16:4]



I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds. I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed upon them by the enemies who seek their lives.

[Jer. 19:8,9]

“Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,” declares the Lord, “and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,” declares the Lord, “and will make it desolate forever. I will bring on that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

[Jer. 25:8-14]

The ever-faithful God will not forget his plans for us, even though we may come to forget his promises to us: "If you change your heart and return to me, I will take you back. Then you may serve me" [Jer. 15:18].

I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banished them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and for the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul. This is what the Lord says: As I have brought all this calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them.

[Jer. 32:37-42]

I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice.

[Jer. 46:28]

As foretold by Jeremiah, there will one day be forged a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah where God's Law will be within his people as written on their hearts. This will be the new covenant as instituted by Jesus Christ.

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

[Luke 22:20]

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

[Heb. 9:15]

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

[2Cor. 3:6]

The Babylonians crush Judah and Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem and takes many prominent citizens back to Babylon, including Daniel. Zedekiah is installed as king, but he rebelled against Babylon. Jeremiah prophesies disaster for the city and the death of the King.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PROPHECY AND ESCHATOLOGY

Old Testament Messiah Prophecy

New Testament Eschatology - The Second Coming of Christ, End-Times

The “Millennium” Issue:

- **Amillennialism**
- **Postmillennialism**
- **Premillennialism**

Resurrection of the Dead

- **The Resurrection Body**

Bible prophecy comprises the passages of the Bible that reflect communications from God to humans through prophets. Apocryphal revelation portrays dramatic, symbolic predictions of future events of world destiny as communicated in visions to the prophets. The Old Testament contains apocalyptic sections in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, most of which were written around the sixth century BC. Much of John's New Testament Revelation is apocalyptic as well.

Jews, Christians and Muslims usually consider biblical prophets of the Old Testament to have received revelations from God. One of the basic doctrines of Christianity is that history is God's blueprint to an appointed future. It's a pathway that leads from genesis to consummation, overseen by God who upholds everything from his sovereign standpoint in eternity. History is the process whereby God carries out his purposes and plans upon mankind. God established his purposes before the foundation of the world, and under his over-arching providence, all events of history serve that purpose. According to Isaiah 46:9,10, God says, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'" When we look for explanations for historical events recorded in the Bible, we must also look beyond the past to the future.

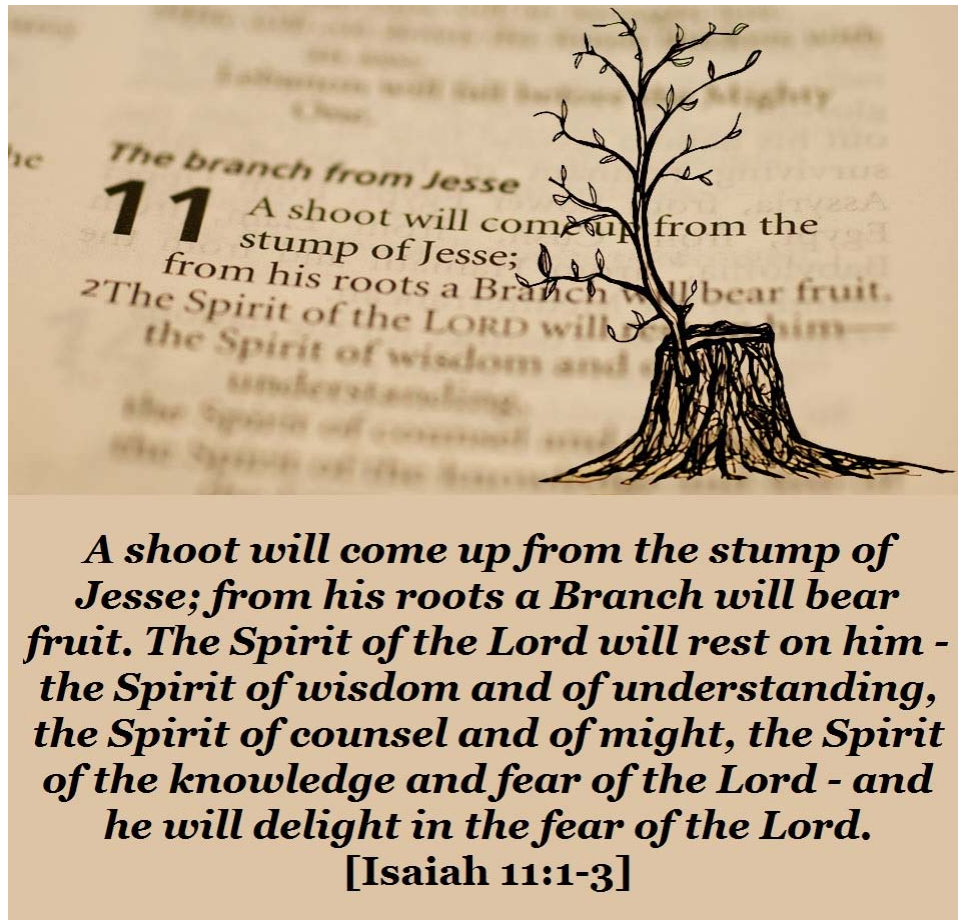
By the very nature of its symbolism, apocalyptic prophesy can be very challenging to interpret. The Revelation of John affirms God's sovereign control over human history and his certain plans for our future. The Book of Revelation is a hybrid of apocalypse and prophecy written within the framework of an ancient letter to seven early Christian churches in Asia Minor. The message is clear – God is in control of history, Christ is coming back, and he will come in judgment, rewarding those who have remained faithful to him.

OLD TESTAMENT MESSIAH PROPHECY:

Bible prophecy is the prediction of future events based on the understanding or faculty of a prophet. Such passages are widely distributed throughout the Bible, but those most often cited are from Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation. Believers in biblical prophecy engage in exegesis (critical interpretation of Scripture) and hermeneutics (the philosophy and

methodology of text interpretation) of Scriptures which they believe contain descriptions of global politics, natural disasters, the future of the nation of Israel, the coming of a Messiah and a Messianic Kingdom, and the ultimate destiny of humankind. Prophetic passages - inspirations, interpretations, admonitions or predictions - appear widely distributed throughout Biblical narratives. Some prophecies in the Bible are conditional, with either the conditions implicitly assumed or explicitly stated. Some prophetic passages are depicted as direct statements from God while other statements are expressed as the privileged perspective of the biblical author considered to be a prophet. The Biblical prophets are usually considered to have received revelations from God, subsequently recording them in the relevant writings.

A major prophetic theme in the Old Testament is the coming of a Messiah (the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation). The Jews entertained many ideas about the expected deliverer, and each of these different schools of Messianic teaching was able to point to statements in the Hebrew scriptures as proof of their contentions. In a general way, the Jews regarded their national history as beginning with Abraham and culminating in the Messiah and the new age of the kingdom of God. In earlier times they had envisaged this deliverer as "the servant of the Lord," then as "the Son of Man," while latterly some even went so far as to refer to the Messiah as the "Son of God." But no matter whether he was called the "seed of Abraham" or "the son of David," all were agreed that he was to be the Messiah, the "anointed one." Thus, did the concept evolve from the "servant of the Lord" to the "son of David," "Son of Man," and "Son of God." In the days of John and Jesus, the more learned Jews had developed an idea of the coming Messiah as the perfected and representative Israelite, combining in himself as the "servant of the Lord" the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.



I have not learned wisdom, nor have I attained to the knowledge of the Holy One. Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Whose hands have gathered up the wind? Who has wrapped up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is the name of his son? Surely you know!
[Prov. 30:3,4]

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [“God with us”].
[Is. 7:14]

In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan— The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.
[Is. 9:1,2]

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

[Is. 9:6,7]

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.

[Is. 42:1]

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

[Is. 49:6]

I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.

[Zech. 3:8]

The Jews devoutly believed that, as Moses had delivered their fathers from Egyptian bondage by miraculous wonders, so would the coming Messiah deliver the Jewish people from Roman domination by even greater miracles of power and marvels of racial triumph. They were looking for a restoration of Jewish national glory -- Israel's temporal exaltation -- rather than for the salvation of the world. There was one feature of the incarnation of Jesus which was utterly foreign to the Jewish conception of the Messiah, and that was the union of the two natures, the human and the divine. The Jews had variously conceived of the Messiah as perfected human, superhuman, and even as divine, but they never entertained the concept of the union of the human and the divine. And this was the great stumbling block of Jesus' early disciples. They grasped the human concept of the Messiah as the son of David, as presented by the earlier prophets; as the Son of Man, the superhuman idea of Daniel and some of the later prophets; and even as the Son of God, as depicted by the author of the Book of Enoch and by certain of his contemporaries; but never had they for a single moment entertained the true concept of the union in one earth personality of the two natures, the human and the divine.

Christians believe that these Messianic prophecies are fulfilled by Christ Jesus, while followers of Rabbinic Judaism still await the arrival of the Jewish Messiah and other signs of Jewish eschatology. Most Christians believe many Messianic prophecies will be fulfilled with the Second Coming of Christ, though some Christians believe that all Messianic prophecies have already been fulfilled (Full Preterism). Rabbinic Judaism does not separate the original coming of the Messiah and the advent of the Messianic Age. Jewish Messianism has its root in the apocalyptic literature of the second century BC to first century BC, promising a future "anointed" leader or Messiah to resurrect the Israelite "kingdom of God", in place of the foreign rulers of the time. This corresponded with the Maccabean Revolt directed against the Seleucids. The following are the scriptural requirements in Judaism concerning the Messiah, his actions, and his reign. Jewish sources insist that the Messiah will fulfill the prophecies outright. Some Christians maintain that some of these prophecies are associated with a putative second coming while Jewish scholars state there is no concept of a second coming in the Hebrew Bible.

- The Sanhedrin will be re-established. [Isaiah 1:26]
- Once he is king, leaders of other nations will look to him for guidance. [Isaiah 2:4]
- The whole world will worship the "One God of Israel". [Isaiah 2:17]
- Jews will return to full Torah observance and practice it.
- He will be descended from King David. [Isaiah 11:1] via Solomon. [1 Chron. 22:8-10]
- The Messiah will be a man of this world, an observant Jew with "fear of God". [Isaiah 11:2]
- Evil and tyranny will not be able to stand before his leadership. [Isaiah 11:4]
- Knowledge of God will fill the world. [Isaiah 11:9]
- He will include and attract people from all cultures and nations. [Isaiah 11:10]
- All Israelites will be returned to the Land of Israel. [Isaiah 11:12]
- Death will be swallowed up forever. There will be no more hunger or illness, and death will cease. [Isaiah 25:8]
- All of the dead will rise again. According to the Zohar (the chief text of the Jewish Kabbalah, presented as an allegorical or mystical interpretation of the Pentateuch), this will happen forty years after the arrival of the Messiah. [Isaiah 26:19]
- The Jewish people will experience eternal joy and gladness. [Isaiah 51:11]
- He will be a messenger of peace. [Isaiah 52:7]
- Nations will end up recognizing the wrongs they did to Israel. [Isaiah 52:13-53:5]
- The peoples of the world will turn to the Jews for spiritual guidance. [Zechariah 8:23]
- The ruined cities of Israel will be restored. [Ezekiel 16:55]
- Weapons of war will be destroyed. [Ezekiel 39:9]
- The Temple will be rebuilt. [Ezekiel 40] resuming many of the suspended commandments.
- He will rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. [Micah 4:1]
- He will gather the Jewish people from exile and return them to Israel. [Isaiah 11:12, 27:12-13]
- He will bring world peace. [Isaiah 2:4, Isaiah 11:6, Micah 4:3]
- He will influence the entire world to acknowledge and serve one God. [Isaiah 11:9, Isaiah 40:5, Zephaniah 3:9]
- He will then perfect the entire world to serve God together. [Zephaniah 3:9]
- He will give you all the worthy desires of your heart. [Psalms 37:4]
- He will take the barren land and make it abundant and fruitful. [Isaiah 51:3, Amos 9:13-15, Ezekiel 36:29-30, Isaiah 11:6-9]

Old Testament prophecies convey the lineage through whom Jesus would be born; they predict the exact place of his birth and they describe his character and ministry, and they foretell his death and his resurrection. These prophecies were told hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. Christian bible scholars have cited the following Old Testament passages as prophecies foretelling the life, status, and legacy of Jesus:

- Deuteronomy 18:18: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him."
- Isaiah 7:14 - Matthew 1:22-23 states that the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us."

- Isaiah 9:1-2 - Matthew 4:13-15 reiterated the prophecy that Jesus would progress toward Galilee.
- Daniel 9:25,26: "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. 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."
- Hosea 11:1 - Matthew 2:14 states, "So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'"
- Psalm 22:16 - The NIV renders this verse as "they pierce my hands and my feet", based on the Septuagint.
- Psalm 16:10: "...because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay."
- Isaiah 9:6 - The verse reads: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*"
- Psalm 110:1 - Matthew 22:44 states "The Lord said to my *Lord*: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'"
- Micah 5:2 - Matthew 2:6 quotes this prophecy as fulfillment of the prophecy: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."
- Zechariah 9:9 - The Gospel of Matthew describes Jesus' triumphant entry on Palm Sunday as a fulfillment of this verse in Zechariah.
- Matthew 2:17-18 gives the killing of innocents by Herod as the fulfillment of a prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."
- II Samuel 7:14 - Hebrews 1:5 quotes this verse as, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son."

The Suffering and Glory of the Servant

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand...

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are

healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

[Is. 52:13-15, 53:3-12]

NEW TESTAMENT ESCHATOLOGY:

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?' Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Messiah," and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.... For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, "Look, here is Christ!" or, "There he is!" do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time.'

[Mat. 24:3-8,14,21-25]

Eschatology is the study of the teachings in the Bible concerning the end times or of the period of time dealing with the return of Christ and the events that follow. Eschatological passages are found in many places, especially Isaiah, Daniel, Matthew 24, and the Book of Revelation, but Revelation often occupies a central place in Christian eschatology. The second coming of Christ is the central event in Christian eschatology. Most Christians believe that death and suffering will continue to exist until Christ's return. The range of Christian eschatology covers such topics as;

- Death
- Post-death intermediate states
- Hell
- The return of Jesus
- The resurrection of the dead
- A rapture
- A great tribulation
- The Millennium
- End of the world
- The last judgment
- A new heaven and a new earth
- The ultimate consummation of all of God's purposes.

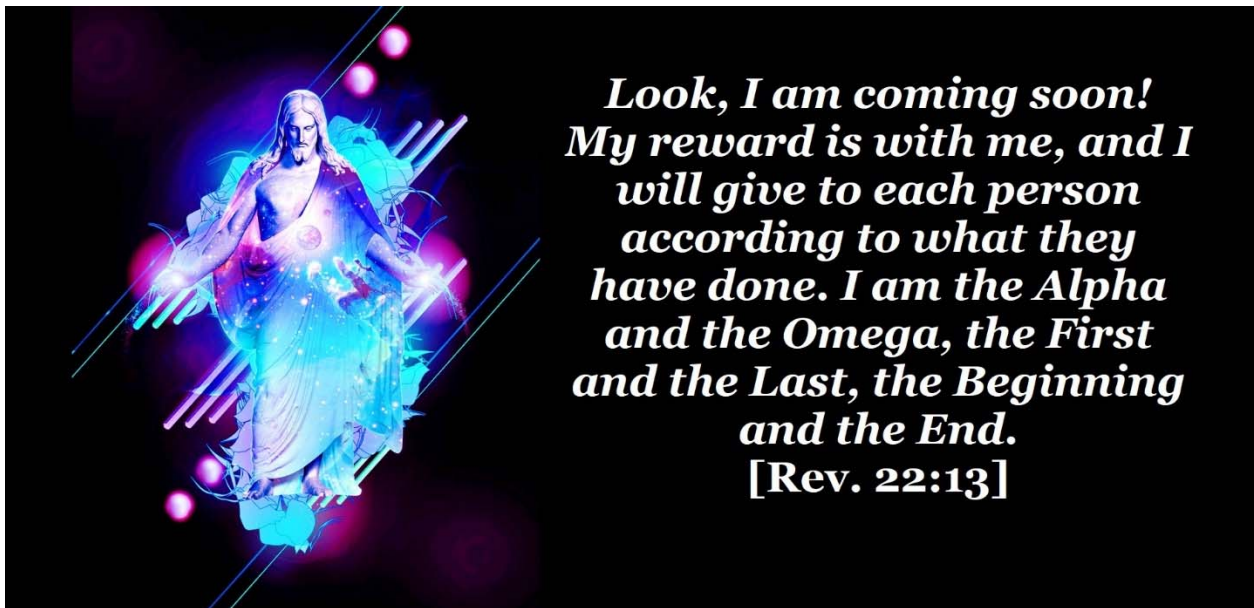
The book of Revelation is at the core of Christian eschatology. The study of Revelation is usually divided into four approaches. In the Futurist approach, Revelation is chiefly seen as referring to events which as yet have not come to pass, but which will come to pass at the end of the age, and the end of the world. This is the approach which applies to most eschatological studies. In the Preterist approach, Revelation chiefly refers to the events of the first century, such as the struggle of Christianity to survive the persecutions of the Roman Empire, the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and the desecration of the Temple in the same year. In the Historicist approach, Revelation provides us with a broad view of history, and passages in Revelation are identified with major historical people and events. In the Idealist (or Spiritualist or Symbolic) approach, the events of Revelation are neither past nor future, but are purely symbolic, dealing with the ongoing struggle and ultimate triumph of good over evil.

The Bible may be clear on many issues, but the timing of the promised return of Christ is still a very controversial topic due to the many Bible citations which can be legitimately interpreted in various ways. While it is clear that no one may know the "day or the hour" of his coming, there are certain historical events that must occur first. There are those who look to the past or present and see these events in question having been or currently being fulfilled concluding that Christ could literally return at any second.

At the time of the writing of the New Testament, the authors not only most profoundly believed in the divinity of the risen Christ, but they also devotedly and sincerely believed in his immediate return to earth to consummate the heavenly kingdom. Among most Christian denominations, the prophecy that Jesus will return to earth is a major doctrine, which can be seen by its inclusion in the Nicene Creed. Many specific timeframes for this prediction have been declared by individuals and groups, although many of these dates have expired without the occurrences predicted. An official statement of the Vatican, issued in 1993, asserted, "we are already in the last hour".

Biblical references claimed to prophecy the end times include:

- Isaiah 2:2,3: The Old Testament prophet Isaiah prophesied that in the end times the kingdom of God would be established in Jerusalem, as chief among the nations. This prophecy was also asserted by the prophet Micah.
- Hosea 3:4,5: The Old Testament prophet Hosea indicated that in the end times Israel would return to their land and seek the Lord their God.
- Acts 2:17-20: The Apostle Peter said that in the end times, God would pour out his spirit on all people and show signs in the heaven and on the earth before the coming great and dreadful Day of the Lord.
- 2 Timothy 3:1-5: The Apostle Paul wrote that there would be terrible times in the end times. People would have a form of godliness but still denying its power.
- Hebrews 1:2: The author of Hebrews wrote that the world was already in the end times.
- James 5:3-5: James wrote that people would hoard wealth in the end times ignoring their own destruction.
- 2 Peter 3:3,4 The Apostle Peter indicated that in the end times, even religious people would dismiss the idea of Christ's return.



Jesus, the Son of God, created the universe, all things visible and invisible, all space throughout all time: "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." [Col. 1:15-17]

Christ will suddenly, physically return and be visible to all, the day and hour unknown. It is the traditional view of Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, preserved from the early Church, that the second coming will be a sudden and unmistakable incident, like "a flash of lightning." Many people have attempted to pinpoint the time of Christ's return and each has

failed. Jesus told his disciples on the Mount of Olives, referenced in Matthew 24:36 that “No one know about the day or the hour,” so it is impossible to pinpoint the exact day or time of Jesus’ return. However, we are told by Jesus that we will know when his return is near.

***In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.
[Daniel 7:13]***

***Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.... Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.
[Mat. 24:30,31,35,36]***

***But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father...Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.
[Matt. 24:36,42-44]***

***When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.
[Mat. 25:31]***

***You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.
[Luke 12:40]***

***This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.
[Acts 1:11]***

***For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.
[1Thess. 4:16]***

Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

[Heb. 9:27,28]

I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time.

[1Tim. 6:13-15]

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

[James 5:8]

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.

[2Peter 3:10]

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

[1John 3:2]

He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

[Rev. 22:20]

When Christ returns, he will judge all. Many Christian denominations consider this second coming of Christ to be the final and eternal judgment by God of the people in every nation resulting in the glorification of some and the punishment of others.:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether to things on earth or things in heaven.

[Col. 1:20]

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge.

[2Tim. 4:1]

See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

[Jude 14,15]

Jesus said, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.

[Rev. 22:12]

We should eagerly await Christ's return. At the end of Revelation, John cried "Come Lord Jesus" [Rev. 22:20] in response to Jesus' promise to return. Similarly, the return of Christ

should bring hope and delight to the hearts of all believers, as with his return Christ will be rightly glorified by all and all things will be set to God's liking:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
[Phil. 3:20,21]

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.
[Tit. 2:11-13]

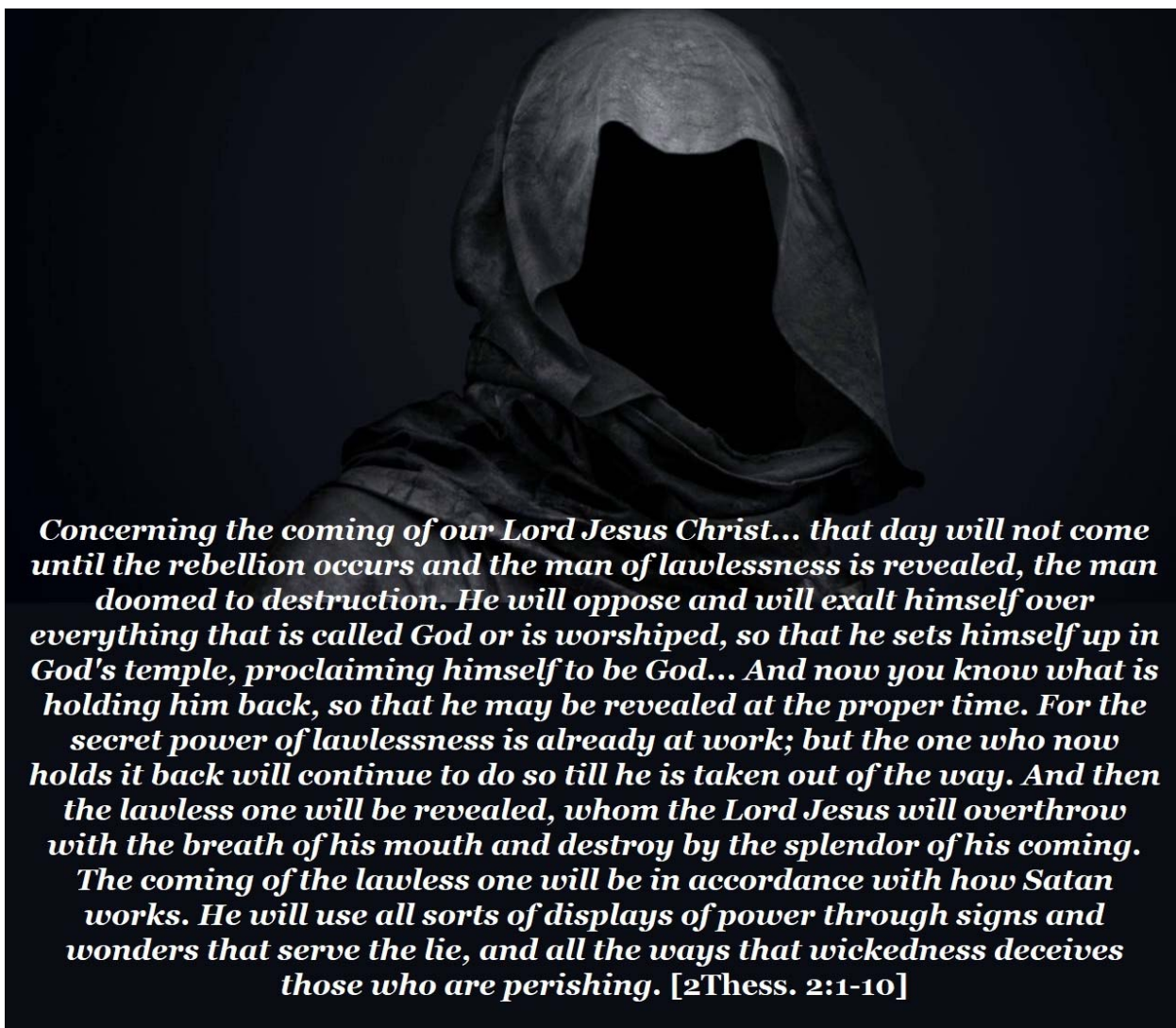
The fact that Christ will return "suddenly" indicates that no-one will legitimately expect him. However, there is much debate as to whether Christ, according to the Scriptures, could return now ("imminently"). This debate arises from events or signs described in the Bible which appear to be a "prerequisite" to Christ's coming. Following verses are listed that indicate the possibility of the imminent return of Christ and the "prerequisite signs":

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!!
[James 5:7-9]

And he who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.
[Rev. 22:20]

There will occur certain events or signs that appear to precede Christ's return. The "man of lawlessness" (who is probably also the "antichrist") must appear, then Christ will destroy him at his second coming. The antichrist is also sometimes associated with the beast in Rev. 13:

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.
[1John 2:18]



The Gospel will be preached to all nations. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.
[Mark 13:10]

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.
[Matthew 24:14]

It will be a time of great tribulation, a time of severe upheaval and trial. The Book of Revelation describes the day of the Lord as an apocalyptic time of God's almighty wrath, which comes upon those who are deemed wicked. The text pictures every man hiding in the rocks of the mountains during a major earthquake to attempt to hide from God's wrath, while

celestial phenomena turn the moon blood red and the sun dark. [Revelation 6:12-17] These celestial phenomena are also mentioned in Joel 2:31, which foretells the same precise order of events mentioned in Revelation: The moon turns blood red and the sun turns dark before the great day of the Lord:

Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.... See, the day of the Lord is coming – a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger – to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and the constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.... Therefore, I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty in the day of his burning anger.
[Is. 13:6,9,10,13]

The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls—never to rise again. In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below.
[Is. 24:18-21]

As he came near the place where I was standing, I was terrified and fell prostrate. ‘Son of man,’ he said to me, ‘understand that the vision concerns the time of the end.... In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.’
[Dan. 8:17,23-26]

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.
[Mark 13:7,8]

Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.
[Mark 13:18-20]

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.

[2Pet. 3:10]

There will come false prophets showing signs and wonders hoping to lead people away from God. Many Christians believe there will be a great deception before the coming of Christ. Satan is going to bring great deceptions to this world in these end times, to deceive as many people as he can and keep them from Christ's kingdom: These false Christs will perform great signs and are no ordinary people "They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty." [Revelation 16:14] Satan's angels will also appear as godly clergymen, and Satan will appear as an angel of light:

For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

[Mark 13:22]

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be... For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

[Matthew 24:21, 24]

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

[2 Corinthians 11:13-15]

There will be seen great wonders in the heavens. It is important to note that "great wonders in the heavens", unlike other signs, could occur in a relatively short time-frame. The reason God will orchestrate these signs in the heavens is to announce that he will now intervene in human affairs in a very visible way. God will use supernatural heavenly signs to signal the beginning of his intervention to punish humanity for our sins - and to rescue us from self-destruction. The sixth seal of Revelation reveals signs and wonders in the heavens never seen since creation. The great tribulation period starts with Jesus Christ opening the seals. The first four seals reveal the 4 horses of Apocalypse. Then follows the opening of the fifth seal which reveals the souls of martyrs crying to Jesus to avenge their blood on those who dwell on earth. The 6th Seal of Revelation reveals signs and wonders in the heavens:

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

[Joel 2:31,32]

But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

[Mark 13:24,25]

I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[Acts 2:19-21]

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

[Rev. 6:12-14]

This will be a day of final judgment. Some Christian denominations consider the Second Coming of Christ to be the final and eternal judgment by God of the people in every nation resulting in the glorification of some and the punishment of others. The concept is found in all the Canonical gospels, particularly the Gospel of Matthew. Christian Futurists believe it will take place after the Resurrection of the Dead and the Second Coming of Christ while Full Preterists believe it has already occurred.:

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

[Dan. 12:1,2]

But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

[Mat. 12:36,37]

Satan himself will be judged. At the cross, Jesus drove out Satan, “the prince of this world” (John 12:31-33). Today, Satan is a usurper; the cross passed initial judgment on him. His claims were destroyed; his claimed authority was invalidated. His defeat was so complete that he has lost his place and authority. The cross doomed Satan to ultimate expulsion from our world, though he is still currently active and desperate in his anger and futility.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil.

[Heb. 2:14]

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 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. 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. 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.

[Rev. 20:7-10]

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. 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. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

[Rev. 20:12-15]

There will come to pass a new heaven and a new earth. Many people have a misconception of what heaven is truly like. Revelation chapters 21-22 gives us a detailed picture of the new heavens and the new earth. After the events of the end times, the current heavens and earth will be done away with and replaced by the new heavens and new earth. The eternal dwelling place of believers will be the new earth. The new earth is the "heaven" on which we will be glorified in Christ's spirit. It is the new earth where the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, will be located. It is on the new earth that the pearly gates and streets of gold will be. Heaven - the new earth - is a physical place where we will dwell with glorified physical bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-58):

See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

[Is. 65:17-19]



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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 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. [Rev. 21:1-3]

Those who are in the new Paradise, the New Jerusalem, will partake of the tree of life forever:

***To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.
[Rev. 2:7]***

THE MILLENNIUM ISSUE:

Jewish apocalyptic writings of the first century speculated about the length of their expected Messiah's reign, when it was assumed that the nation of Israel would be restored to glory by God. The time spans were as little as 40 to as many as 7,000 years. The author of 4 Ezra thought the Messiah's reign would last 400 years (7:28). The original audience of Revelation probably would have been familiar with the idea of a limited reign of the Messiah. The "Millennium" has evolved as a term applied to that time-period implied in the Book of Revelation to as a "thousand years". [Rev. 20:1-7].

An important point of Revelation is to reinterpret Old Testament prophecies in terms of Jesus' redemptive work and the church. Revelation was written to point out that the church was the recipient of God's grace, made possible by Jesus' saving work. The book's message to the church contradicted the Jewish idea that salvation would come to the Jewish people alone.

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 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.



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. [Rev. 20:1-7]

Paul does not speak of Christ's kingdom as existing for any limited time. Neither do the other New Testament writings. The only mention of 1,000 years is in the book of Revelation – a book filled with symbolic numbers. This prompts us to ask whether this is to be taken as an indefinite period of time of some substantial duration - while the "millennium" may be a period of substantial length, its actual time is undetermined. Any attempt to answer this

question must rely on the context of Revelation 20, for no other Bible verse clearly discusses such a specific time-period. But we should realize that we are attempting to use a single passage from John's Revelation, a highly symbolic book, as the basis of a dogmatic conclusion about any theological doctrine of Millennialism.

In Psalm 50:10, God speaks of himself as owner of all that exists, that "every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." The expression is not to be taken literally, as if God owned cattle only on 1,000 specific hills. Job 9:3 mentions, "Though they wished to dispute with him [God], they could not answer him one time out of a thousand." In the New Testament, Peter says that with God one day might just as well be a thousand years and a thousand years a day (2 Peter 3:8). What we consider a long period of time, to God is but a very short time. This expresses the idea that time has no meaning for God, so we need to understand the significance and timing of events from his perspective, and not ours.

The Bible doesn't describe the characteristics of the kingdom of God. When the kingdom of God is mentioned in the New Testament, the emphasis is on the age of the church, on the promised return of Jesus, and on some event of final judgment. The book of Revelation spends much time describing the time immediately before Jesus' return and the eventual establishment of God's kingdom in glory. However, it gives only a brief description of events that come after Christ's return; rather, it concentrates on the last judgment.

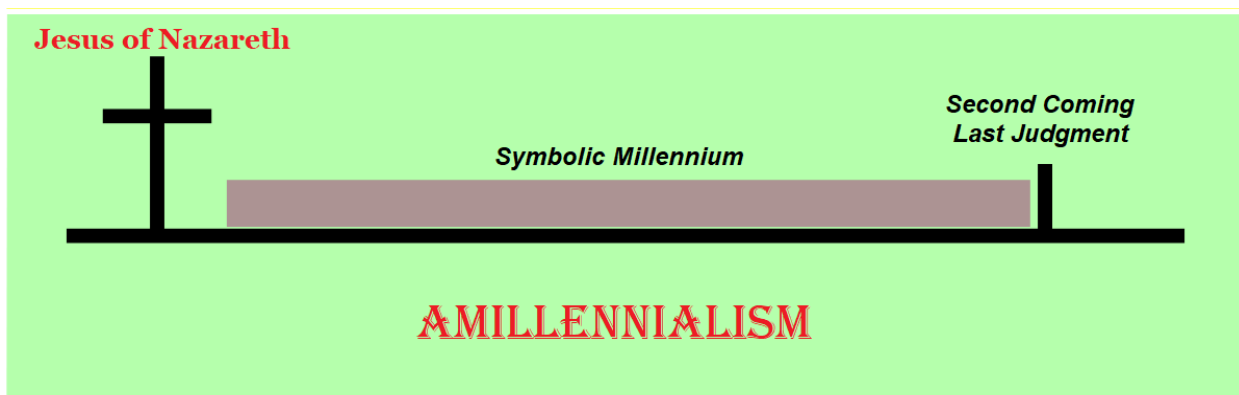
***Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything,
as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.
[Acts 3:21]***

We are not exactly certain when the millennium will occur, has occurred, is occurring, or whether such is coincident with the second coming of Christ. However, the return of Christ is often said to be at either the beginning or the end of "the millennium". There are three main interpretations on the issue of the millennium: Amillennialism, Premillennialism and Postmillennialism. Problems exist with all of these perspectives and reconciling scriptural passages on this topic has resulted in having to decide which interpretations of a passage seems most correct or least incorrect based on limited disclosed knowledge. The Bible is not always clear on these issues.

These three terms stem from the word millennium, meaning a period of a thousand years understood as a kind of "new Eden". Pre- and postmillennialism divide over the question of whether the second coming of Christ will take place before or after the thousand years mentioned repeatedly in Revelation. Scripture teaches that the return of Jesus Christ results in the resurrection of his saints. [1 Corinthians 15:23, 51-55] According to Paul, "the dead in Christ shall rise first." This is sometimes referred to as "the first resurrection" depicted in Revelation 20:6. Revelation 20:4-6 begins the 1000 years with the resurrection of the saints. The resurrection of the saints, who are called "the dead in Christ," occurs when Jesus Christ returns. [1Cor.13:51-55; 1Thes. 4:16,17] Thus it is the return of Jesus Christ, when his saints are resurrected, that would mark the beginning of the Millennium. During the 1000 years, Satan is represented as being bound with a chain because his new circumstances prevent him from deceiving the nations during the Millennium (Revelation 20:2).

Preterism is a belief that the events prophesized in the New Testament have already happened. The great war of Armageddon in the book of Revelation occurred in the late 60's and early 70's AD when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, many Jews were killed and the rest were driven from Palestine. When Jesus talked about the end of the world, he did not mean that the physical world would be no more. He taught that the old worldview held by various contemporary Jewish groups was coming to an end, to be replaced by a new concept, the kingdom of God. Thus, all of the major elements in the book of Revelation (Tribulation, Armageddon, Rapture, etc.) actually took place in the first century AD. Most skeptics and liberal Christian theologians largely interpret the contents of the books of Daniel and Revelation as having no meaningful prophetic information for our future. Many regard Revelation as being composed of visions, hallucinations or nightmares of the author, of little meaning for Christians today. Some believe that the purpose of the book of Revelation was to stiffen resolve in the early Christian movement so that members could withstand persecution by the Roman Empire. Thus, its purpose was to predict persecutions and other events that were going to happen to the early Christian church.

Amillennialism



Amillennialism is really a misnomer, for they believe that the millennium (seen as Christ's heavenly rule) coincides with the Gospel age and tribulation. Christ's return and rapture are followed immediately by the new heavens and new earth. "Amillennialism," implies that there is not a traditional "millennium." It believes the millennium of Rev. 20 is the present and heavenly reign of Christ and the saints, spanning the period of time from Christ's first coming to shortly before his second coming.

Amillennialists do not deny the notion of a millennium. Rather, they argue that John's "millennium" is the age in which we now live, in which Jesus reigns as Lord by virtue of his resurrection and ascension. According to this scenario, Christ will return after, or at the end of, the present age. Consequently, this "amillennial" view is a variation of postmillennialism. Amillennialism rejects the idea of a future millennium in which Christ will reign on earth prior to the initiating the eternal age; it holds that:

- Jesus is presently reigning from heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father.
- Jesus is and will remain with the church until the end of the world, as he promised at the Ascension.
- At Pentecost (or days earlier, at the Ascension), the millennium began, citing Acts 2:16-21, where Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 on the coming of the kingdom, to explain what is happening.
- Therefore, the Church and its establishment of the good news is the foundation of Christ's kingdom and forever will remain as such.

Amillennialists also cite scripture references to the kingdom not being a physical realm: Matthew 12:28 cites Jesus' driving out of demons as evidence that the kingdom of God had come upon them. In Luke 17:20–21, Jesus warns that the coming of the kingdom of God cannot be observed, that it is already among them. In Romans 14:17, Paul speaks of the kingdom of God being in terms of the spiritual fruits springing forth from the Christians' actions. According to "Amillennialism", there is no future millennium yet to come. The thousand years refers to the church age in which we are now living. The "thousand years" merely implies a long-time period (of indefinite length) where Satan's power has been diminished to the point where the gospel can spread to all nations of the world, and those who 'reign with Christ' are those who have already died in him. Obviously, the reign is a spiritual reign as expressed in Matthew 28:18 when Jesus said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Following the "thousand years", Christ will return to earth; believers will be glorified and non-believers will be judged.

Amillennialists see the millennium as a recapitulation of the history of the church current and on-going. The binding of Satan describes the restraint of Satan's power suggested in Matthew 12:29; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:9; and 2 Thessalonians 2:7. They take the thousand years as figurative for the period from Christ's ascension to the appearance of the Antichrist. They see the release of Satan (Rev. 20:3,7) as equivalent to the revelation of the Antichrist. They identify the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16; 17:13-14; 19:11-21) with the Battle of Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:8-9).

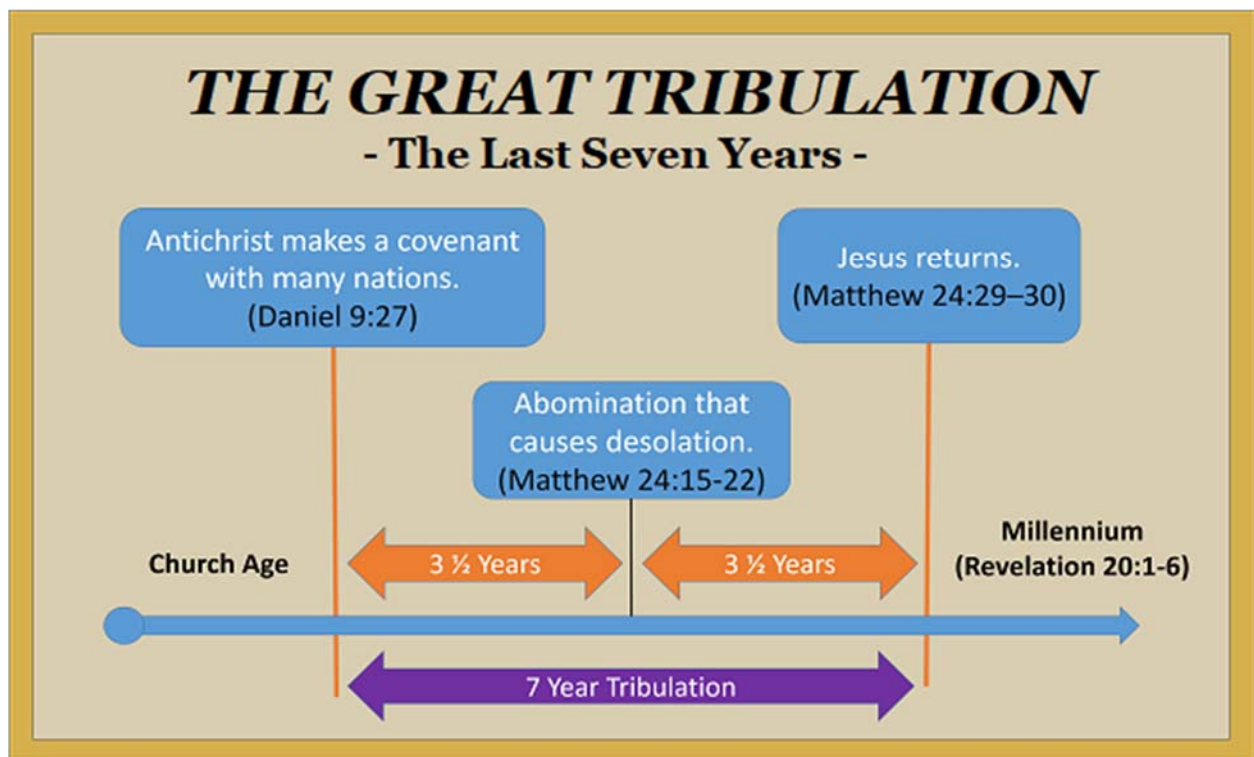
***This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood. The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshek and Tiras.
[Gen. 10:1,2]***



The Bible prophesies a seven-year period that will immediately precede the Battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth. Many important events are foretold to occur during this final seven years. The Bible warns that before Jesus returns to the earth, things are going to get much worse. In fact, most of the prophecies that haven't

yet been fulfilled will be fulfilled during the final seven years just before Christ's return. This final seven years is referred to as the tribulation and also as the seventieth week of Daniel. Daniel's prophecy tells us that the Antichrist will confirm a covenant (peace agreement) with many nations that will be effective for a period of one seven.

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]



Amillennialism gained ground after Christianity became a legal religion in the Roman Empire. It was systematized by St. Augustine in the fourth century, and this systematization carried amillennialism over as the dominant eschatology of the Medieval and Reformation periods. Augustine was originally a premillennialist, but he retracted that view, claiming the doctrine was carnal. Amillennialism became the dominant view of the Protestant Reformers.

Postmillennialism



Postmillennialism sees the conflict between good and evil on earth as gradually giving way to the fullness of the kingdom and victory of the church which is the millennium, followed by Christ's coming in judgment and the new heavens and new earth. It believes that the millennium will be a time of the triumph of the gospel, a substantial Christianization of the world, before the return of Christ. The millennium is either coextensive with the present age or it begins sometime during the present age.

Postmillennialism holds that Jesus Christ establishes his kingdom on earth through his preaching and redemptive work early in the first century and that he equips his church with the gospel, empowers her by the Spirit, and charges her with the "great commission" (Matt 28:19) to disciple all nations.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.
[Mat. 24:14]

Postmillennialism expects that eventually the vast majority of people living will be saved; increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of men and of nations. After an extensive era of such conditions, Jesus Christ will return visibly, bodily, and gloriously, to end history with the general resurrection and the final judgment after which the eternal age follows.

No More Wars

He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.
[Psalms 46:8,9]

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning

hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

[Is. 2:4]

In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.

[Hosea 2:18]

I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

[Zech. 9:10]

No More Hunger

They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water.

[Is. 49:10]

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[Rev. 7:16,17]

The Postmillennial view places Christ's second advent after the passage of the millennium. Only then will the rapture, the general resurrection, the general judgment, and the eternal ages occur. The millennium is not understood to involve a visible reign of Christ in the form of an earthly monarchy, nor is the millennial period to be taken literally as necessarily 1000 years long. But the postmillennial view does posit a recognizable millennial period, a golden age of prosperity and peace among all at the end of which Christ will return. The millennium will arrive gradually under the increasing influence of Christianity, leading to the pervasive reduction of evil and to greatly improved conditions in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres. In fact, the entire world will eventually be Christianized to the point that the Christian belief and value system will become the accepted norm for all nations - Matthew 28:18-20 will become a reality:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

[Mat. 28:18,19]

According to Postmillennialism, the current church age will develop into a physical kingdom of God, where the Father's will is more truly done, as the world is transformed more and more by the gospel. Following the "thousand years", Christ will return, believers and non-believers will be raised, judgement will occur and there will be a new heaven and a new earth followed by eternity. Today, Postmillennialism influence has gradually receded due in part to the disillusionment following the World Wars of the twentieth century, though Postmillennialism was a dominant theological belief among American Protestants who promoted reform movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as abolitionism and the "Social Gospel". Postmillennialism has become one of the key tenets of a movement that became known as Christian Reconstructionism.

The belief that religious revivals and the resulting improvement in human faith and morals would eventually usher in a thousand years of peace and justice antecedent to the second coming of Christ. This belief became a powerful impetus to the promotion of Progressive reforms. During the Second Great Awakening of the 1830s, some hopefuls expected the millennium to arrive in a few years. By the 1840s, however, the great day had receded to the distant future, and post-millennialism became the religious benchmark of the broader American middle-class ideology of steady moral and material progress. Postmillennialism also teaches that the forces of Satan will gradually be defeated by the expansion of the kingdom of God throughout history up until the second coming of Christ.

Many Postmillennialists also adopt some form of Preterism, which holds that many of the end times prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled. Revivalist postmillennialism is a form of the doctrine held by the Puritans and some today that teaches that the millennium will come about not from Christians changing society from the top down (that is, through its political and legal institutions) but from the bottom up at the grass roots level (that is, through changing people's hearts and minds). Reconstructionist postmillennialism, on the other hand, sees that along with grass roots preaching of the Gospel and explicitly Christian education, Christians should also set about changing society's legal and political institutions in accordance with Biblical ethics.

Premillennialism

Premillennialism, in Christian eschatology, is the belief that Jesus will physically return to the earth (the Second Coming) before the Millennium, a literal thousand-year golden age of peace. The doctrine is called "premillennialism" because it holds that Jesus' physical return to earth will occur prior to the inauguration of the Millennium. Premillennialism is often used to refer specifically to those who adhere to the beliefs in an earthly millennial reign of Christ as well as a rapture of the faithful coming before (dispensational) or after (historic) the Great Tribulation preceding the Millennium. There are two interpretations of premillennialism: "Classic" and "Pre-Tribulational". These views together are called "Premillennialism" as they teach that Christ will return previous to the period known as "the Millennium". Premillennialists believe that there will be an "intermediate kingdom," a millennial reign that

is coextensive with neither the present age nor the final age of destiny and that the basis for this intermediate kingdom is found in Rev. 20:1-6.

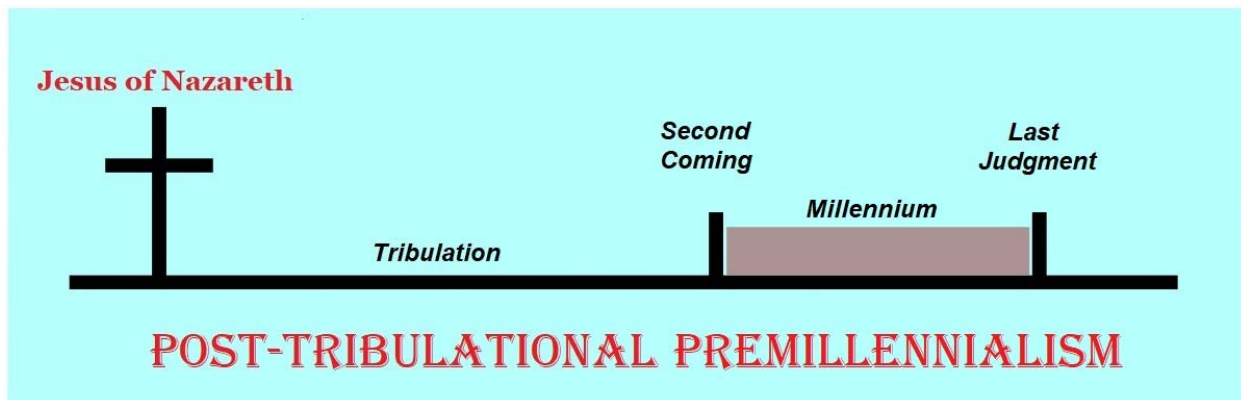
Classic Premillennialism teaches that the order of events is: tribulation, rapture, millennium, new heavens and earth. It believes in an earthly millennial kingdom set up after the return of Christ and including all of God's people, both Jews and Gentiles. In contrast to dispensational premillennialism, those who hold the historic premillennialist view argue that Christ's second advent will be a one-stage event after the tribulation. Either at this time or before, the vast majority of Jews will be converted. Believers who have died will be raised, those alive will be transformed, and all believers will meet Christ in the air and then descend with him to earth. Christ will then slay the Antichrist, bind Satan, and set up his millennial kingdom on earth.

Christ and his redeemed, both Jews and Gentiles as one people of God, will reign visibly over the unbelieving nations still on earth. People in resurrected bodies and natural bodies will live together on the earth. Sin and death will still exist, but external evil will be restrained. The 1000 years of the millennial kingdom will be a time of social, political, and economic justice and great prosperity. After these 1000 years, Satan will be loosed in order to deceive the unbelieving nations into making a final assault against the redeemed. Satan will be destroyed, and the resurrection of the dead unbelievers will occur. Then will come the judgment of all, both believers and unbelievers, and eternity.

According to the Classic view, the present church age will continue until a time of great tribulation occurs. Following this time of suffering on the earth, Christ will return. At the time of his coming, believers who have died will have their bodies restored to their souls and will reign with Him on earth for the duration of the Millennium. At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed, will gather an army of followers and will try to attack Christ, but will be decisively defeated. Following this, the bodies of all unbelievers who have died throughout history will be raised and judged; and believers will enter into the eternal state.

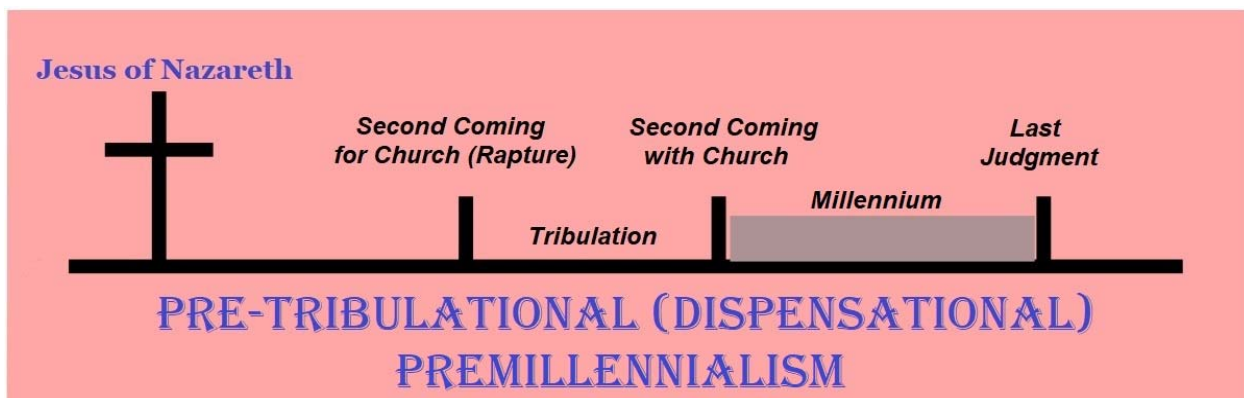
Those who accept the Premillennial position have specific views as to when Jesus will remove believers from the earth before he returns (the Rapture). A seven-year period called the Tribulation will precede Christ's return:

1. **Pretribulationists**: They expect the Rapture to take place before seven years of tribulation.
2. **Midtribulationists**: They say the Rapture will occur midway through the seven-year tribulation.
3. **Posttribulationists**: They view states that the church will go through the tribulation but will remain at the time of Christ's second coming.



Dispensationalism Premillennialism teaches this order: "secret rapture" of the believers, tribulation, Christ's return, millennium, new heavens and new earth. Pretributational Premillennialism is very similar to the classic view above, except that Christ is expected to return "secretly" before the "Great Tribulation", collect believers and take them with him to heaven for a period of seven years. It believes in an earthly millennial kingdom set up after the return of Christ in which Christ rules over the re-established theocracy of Israel.

During this seven-year period, the time of tribulation will occur as will many other of the signs (especially also the conversion of many Jews). Following the seven-year period, Christ will return with believers to reign for the duration of the millennium as in the classic view. And following the millennium, the bodies of all unbelievers who have died throughout history will be raised and judged, and believers will enter into the eternal state.



RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD:



I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”
[1Cor. 15:50-54]

Afterlife is the concept that an essential part of an individual's identity or their stream of consciousness continues to manifest after the death of the physical body. According to various ideas about the afterlife, the essential aspect of the individual that lives on after death may be some partial element, or the entire soul or spirit, of that individual, which carries with it and may once again confer personal identity. Belief in an afterlife, which may be naturalistic or supernatural, is in contrast to the belief in oblivion after death. This continued existence often takes place in a spiritual realm. Some belief systems, such as those in the Abrahamic tradition, hold that the dead go to a specific plane of existence after death, as determined by God, or other divine judgment, based on their actions or beliefs during life.

Resurrection of the dead is used in the doctrine and theology of various religions to describe an event by which a person, or people are resurrected (brought back to life). Various forms of this concept can be found in Islamic, Jewish and Zoroastrian eschatology. In the New Testament of the Christian Bible, the three common usages for this term pertain to the resurrection of Jesus, the raising from the dead of all men at the end of this present age, and the resurrection of certain ones in history who were restored to life. In Judaism, there is a belief that the God of Israel will one day give life to the righteous during the Messianic Age, and they will live forever in the world to come. Jews base this belief on the prophecies contained in the Hebrew Bible: the Book of Isaiah, Book of Ezekiel, and Book of Daniel. They believe that both the righteous and the wicked who are deceased will be resurrected and judged by God. They believe that the righteous Jews and the righteous Gentiles will have eternal life on earth in the world to come, while the wicked will be punished and executed.

Traditional Christianity is intentionally reticent on the afterlife, as it acknowledges it is an enigmatic mystery. Beyond the second coming of Jesus, resurrection of the dead, and final judgment, all of which is affirmed in the Nicene Creed (325 AD), tradition does not teach much else in any definitive manner. In the first century AD, very few ideas about the afterlife were operative; but we can begin to see the origins of our present concepts in the beliefs of

early Christians. Prior to the Second Temple period (before 530 BC), both Jewish and Greek thought were dominated by the idea that people went to the same place after death and lived a shadowy existence. In the Hebrew Bible this place is called Sheol, and in Greek texts like "The Odyssey" it is called Hades. By the Second Temple period (530 BC to 70 AD when the Second Temple of Jerusalem existed), apocalyptic literature had configured separate spaces for persons both before and after the final judgment, based upon different types of earthly behavior. The final judgment, or day of judgment, refers to a future date on which all of the dead will be raised, souls will be reunited with bodies, and all people and nations will be judged by God. Hades" [Greek] ("Sheol" [Hebrew]) means "the place of the unseen" designating the invisible world of the dead. All those who die pass from the visible world to the invisible.

***Before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and utter darkness,
to the land of deepest night, of utter darkness and disorder, where even the
light is like darkness.***
[Job 10:21,22]

***Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the
deepest darkness?***
[Job 38:17]

You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.
[Ps. 88:6]

***But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are deep in the
realm of the dead.***
[Prov. 9:18]

The realm of the dead below is all astir to meet you at your coming.
[Is. 14:9]

In Christianity and Judaism, the Book of Life is the book in which God records the names of every person who is destined for Heaven or "the world to come". In the Hebrew Bible the Book of Life records forever all people considered righteous before God. To be blotted out of this book signifies death. It is with reference to the Book of Life that the holy remnant is spoken of as being written unto life in Jerusalem; compare also Ezekiel 9:4, where one of the six heavenly envoys "who had the scribe's inkhorn upon his loins" is told to mark the righteous for life, while the remainder of the inhabitants of Jerusalem are doomed. The Psalms also speaks of a book of the living: "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous."

Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.

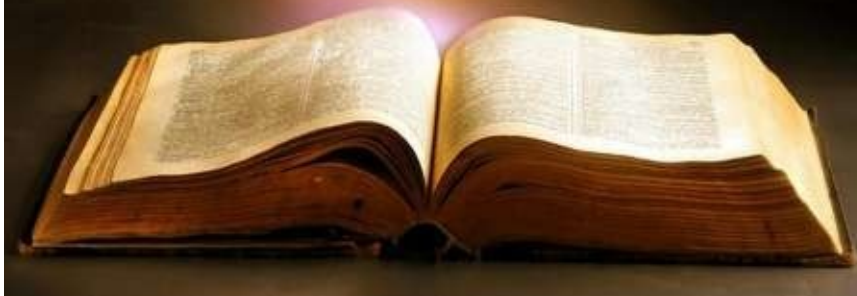
[Ex. 32:33]

All the curses written in this book will fall on them, and the Lord will blot out their names from under heaven.

[Deut. 29:20]

May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.

[Ps. 69:28]



The Greek Word “Gehenna” means “Hell”, a place of eternal punishment. According to Christianity, mortal beings cannot avoid Hades, but they can avoid Hell by believing in Jesus and receiving eternal life. Hades encompasses all intermediate abodes of the dead subject to God’s inevitable judgment over the dead. In the end days, death and Hades will be destroyed by being cast into the lake of fire. The judgment of a “second death” would be spiritual and eternal, the just punishment for the wicked. The second death refers to the experience of eternal death in the lake of fire.

May burning coals fall on them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise.

[Ps. 140:10]

Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?

[Is. 33:14]

And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

[Mat. 5:22]

It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

[Mat. 5:29]

This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[Mat. 13:49,50]

Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

[Mat. 25:41]

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

[Mark 9:43]

His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

[Luke 3:17]

Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell.

[Luke 12:5]

The fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

[1Cor. 3:13-15]

He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.

[Rev. 2:11]

But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

[Rev. 19:20]

In our earliest Christian writings in the first century AD., Paul and the Gospel writers worked within this framework and imagined different places for the righteous and the wicked at the last judgment or immediately after death. In the Gospel of Matthew, for example, we find the now-popular image of Peter and the keys to the kingdom of Heaven (Matt 16:17-20), although the only “gates” mentioned there are still the gates of Hades. In Luke’s Gospel we find the punishment of the rich man and the reward of the poor man Lazarus residing with Abraham in comfort after his death (Luke 16):

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

[Luke 16:22-26]

But in many of the other early depictions of eternal torment are of masses of unnamed sinners (Matt 8:12, Matt 13:42, Matt 13:50, Matt 22:13, Matt 24:51, Matt 25:30; Rev 19:19-21, Rev 20:7-15). The unnamed are still a far cry from our contemporary visions of the afterlife that will entail a final judgment that happens at some time in the future, not immediately after death. But these New Testament appropriations of apocalyptic thought later developed into more robust concepts of an afterlife. In the time of Jesus and the decades that followed, the binary understanding of the afterlife was emerging, influenced by Jewish apocalyptic thought and Greek philosophy. In the late first century AD, we see a fusion occurring between these Jewish and Greek concepts in the New Testament Gospels. These new concepts of the afterlife would later be harmonized into the early Christian ideas of heaven and hell that are more familiar today.

Eternal life traditionally refers to continued life after death, as outlined in Christian eschatology. The Apostles' Creed testifies: "I believe... the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting." In this view, eternal life commences after the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead, although in the New Testament's Johannine literature there are references to eternal life commencing in the earthly life of the believer, possibly indicating an inaugurated eschatology. One of Jesus' most significant miracles recorded in the Bible was the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead (John 11). When Lazarus died, Jesus said, "'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.' His disciples replied, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.' Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep." (John 11:11-13).

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

[John 11:23-26]

There are recorded instances of people who had been raised from the dead in the Old Testament, some by direct translation to heaven, others where life is returned to those who had died:

Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more because God took him away.

[Genesis 5:23,24]

Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!" The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.

[1 Kings 17:21,22]

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.

[2 Kings 2:11,12]

When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

[2 Kings 4:32-35]

There are numerous Old Testament references that express confidence in life after death. Although the New Testament reflects much more specific revelation from God on the afterlife, yet there are strong Old Testament indicators that express this same expectation. David comforted himself with the knowledge that he would see his dead child once again, and Samuel appeared to Saul through the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28). Even the careful attention that the Hebrews paid to the remains of their dead suggest some notion of an afterlife.

The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

[1 Samuel 2:6]

Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?

[Ecc. 3:21]

And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

[Ecc. 12:7]

In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality.

[Prov. 12:28]

He will swallow up death forever.

[Is. 25:8]

But your dead will live, Lord; their bodies will rise— let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy— your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.

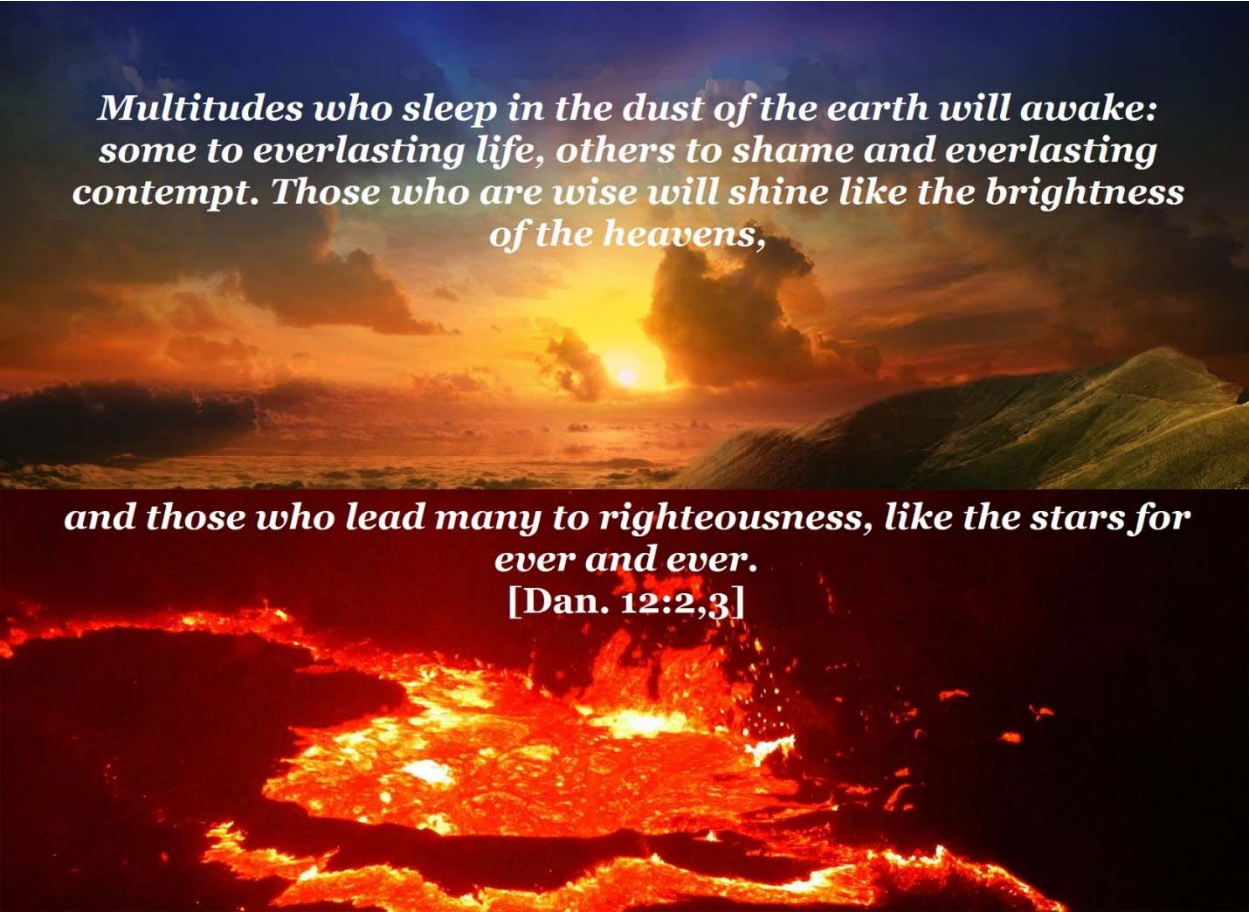
[Is. 26:19]

From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.... But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.

[Jonah 2:2,6]

As for you [Daniel], go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

[Dan. 12:13]



Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens,

and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

[Dan. 12:2,3]

Job held the assurance that although in death he was going to be eaten by worms, he would one day receive a new body, and in that body, he would actually see God face to face.

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself

***will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns
within me!***
[Job 19:25-27]

Many have argued that immortality is a New Testament idea despite the fact that passages such as the Psalms and Daniel 12:1-3 clearly refer to life after death and a bodily resurrection. In the 73rd Psalm, a man named Asaph describes how he almost lost his faith in God when he considered how evil people prospered and the godly suffered. But then he said he went into the sanctuary of God. From the perspective of worship, he suddenly saw evil men standing on the slippery ground of their mortality. With new insight, he confesses, “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Ps. 73:24-26)

Psalm 49 presents a stark contrast between the end of the lives of the wicked and the end of the lives of the righteous. The wicked are like “the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49:12,20) without any hope that they “should live on forever.” (Ps. 49:9) However, the righteous have the triumphant expectation that “God will redeem [them] from the grave” (Hebrew, Sheol); “he will surely take [them] to himself.” (Ps. 49:15) The idea is the same as that of Genesis 5:24 regarding God’s taking of Enoch to himself: God will snatch, take, or receive us to himself when we die. Psalm 73:23-25 makes a similar contrast between the wicked and the righteous where he will take the righteous into glory. Once again, there is a faith that reaches beyond this life, and it centers on this verb “to take”. Says the psalmist, “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.” (Ps. 73:24) Accordingly, it can be argued that the “taking” of a person from this earth implies that mortals are capable of inhabiting heavenly realms. For the believer in Yahweh in Old Testament times, death did not end it all. There was life after death, and that life was to be in the presence of the living God. While Enoch did not experience “resurrection”, he did experience glorification. He did, along with Elijah, transcend this mortal life and went in his body to be with God. Since Enoch and Elijah had not died directly, they could not technically be resurrected.

Life After Death in Psalms

- “Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.” [Psalms 16:9,10]
- “As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.” [Psalms 17:15]
- “All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive. [Psalms 22:29]
- “You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit.” [Psalms 30:3]
- “Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.” [Psalms 31:5]
- “But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself.” [Psalms 49:15]

- “For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.” [Psalms 56:13]
- “When you ascended on high, you took many captives... Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death.” [Psalms 68:18,20]
- “May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.” [Psalms 69:28]
- “You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.” [Psalms 73:24]
- “You have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead.” [Psalms 86:13]
- “For you, Lord, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.” [Psalms 116:8]
- “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.” [Psalms 139:7,8]

When questioned by the Sadducees about the resurrection of the dead (in a context relating to who one's spouse would be if one had been married several times in life), Jesus said that marriage will be irrelevant after the resurrection as the resurrected will be like the angels in heaven. Jesus also maintained that the time would come when the dead would hear the voice of the Son of God, and all who were in the tombs would come out, who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation.

But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.
[Luke 20:35,36]

At the time of Moses' encounter with God, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were long-since dead, but Jesus reminds us that God spoke of his relationship with them in the present tense as though they were still living in the afterlife: “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.” [Luke 20:35-38] Jesus and Luke believed that the patriarchs were alive at the present time. The Gospels express a belief in their conscious life after death, not only for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but also for Elijah and Moses himself.

There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.
[Mat. 17:2,3]

Jesus pointed out to His hearers that God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - and God is not the God of the dead (and therefore some consciousness of these must be alive and in a relationship with God):

But about the resurrection of the dead - have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

[Matt. 22:32]

There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.

[Luke 13:28-30]



But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.

[Luke 20:37,38]

Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.

[John 8:56]

When Jesus returns, our loved ones asleep in Christ will awake from their tombs. No matter how long the time has passed, be it long or short, will seem but a moment to them. By the voice of Jesus, they are called forth from their deep slumber they will begin to think just where they ceased, awakening to a glorious immortality. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, came to the earth to give us this gift of eternal life. Jesus took on the punishment that all of us deserve and sacrificed his life to pay the penalty for our sin. Three days later, He proved himself victorious over death by rising from the grave. He remained on the earth for forty days and was witnessed by hundreds before ascending to heaven. The resurrection of the Christ is a well-documented event. The apostle Paul challenged people to question

eyewitnesses for its validity, and no one was able to contest its truth. The resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Because Christ was raised from the dead, we can have faith that we, too, will be resurrected. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof of life after death. Christ was only the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again.

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

[Rom. 6:3-7]

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

[Rom. 8:11]

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[Rom. 8:38,39]

By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

[1 Cor. 6:14]

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

[1 Cor. 15:20-23]

Although we will be eventually resurrected, not everyone will go to heaven. A choice must be made by each person in this life, and this choice will determine one's eternal destiny. The Bible says that it is appointed for us to die only once, and after that will come judgment (Hebrews 9:27). In the book of Revelation, we find that when Christ returns, Satan will be incarcerated and bound in the abyss for 1,000 years. When Christ returns, the faithful will be immortalized. The first resurrection, as it is called, is for the faithful Christians. But if there is a "first" resurrection, there is also a "second" resurrection. The Apostle Paul spoke about the order of resurrections, explaining that Jesus Christ is the "firstfruits", the first to be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:20) – this is followed by those who are Christ's. After these

come the "rest of the dead" mentioned in Revelation 20:5. The "rest of the dead" are those who will come under judgment.



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. 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. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.
[Rev. 20:12-15]

In Millennialism, the kingdom of God rules on this earth for a thousand years; there will be a great resurrection of billions of people to judgment. The books of the Bible are opened to the understanding of the masses of people for the first time. The resurrection to physical life from the valley of dry bones, described by the prophet Ezekiel, also takes place at this time. The Book of Life is finally opened to all of them. This will be their first opportunity to really learn the truth. This is not a second chance as some would like to call it. All human beings will be held accountable for their actions and thoughts. But this will be their first time for many to see their sins, to have the opportunity to repent of their sins, and to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. Non-Christians will sleep in the grave until the Judgment and then have their first opportunity to learn the truth and God's way of life. Then, ultimately, will come the final punishment for those who have sealed their conscience and their character to reject the love of God and the sacrifice of Christ.

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live... for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.
[John 5:24-29]

The Bible pronounces on the fate of those who have not put their trust in God:

[Paul said] *"I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."*

[Acts 24:15]

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"... Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

[Matt. 25:41, 46]

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.

[Rom. 2:5-10]

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. 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. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

[Rev. 20:12-15]

A believer who is faithful to death is promised salvation and the experience of eternal life in the hereafter. Such a believer will rule and reign with Christ in the kingdom sharing in his royal splendor.

If we endure, we shall also reign with him.

[2Tim 2:12]

The mission of reaching the world with the good news of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ is the ongoing and honorable Christian goal, but it has been asked if it is possible to be saved through Christ without knowing Christ or his gospel. The Bible discloses those of faith in the Old testament who found salvation while having no knowledge of Jesus. God assures us that all who honestly seek him – who act in faith on the knowledge that they have amassed – will be rewarded. This is true even for those who haven't heard of Jesus and have not had the opportunity to read witness of him in the Bible. To attain eternal salvation, it is God himself will find a way to bring such a lost lamb into his heavenly flock.



My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.
[John 14:2,3]

When a man is ignorant of God's ways through no fault of his own, God works within the heart of that man by virtue of his inner desire to know God. The Lord knows the dedicated disposition within a man's soul that freely wills to be conformed to God's will. Man may lack as a great deprivation many of the great gifts and graces and helps that God so magnanimously makes available to mankind through his Son and his Spirit, but God will find a way to lay down a righteous path for such a faithful and searching heart: "For he who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a reward to those who seek him." [Heb. 11:6] A similar position can be made for children who die before they have reached the age of moral discernment and spiritual wisdom, as well as for challenged individuals with critical mental handicaps.

People throughout the world have been revealed some knowledge of the one true God. This knowledge has been reverently handed down through the generations in virtually all cultures scattered throughout the world: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for... And without faith it is impossible to please God." [Heb. 11:1,6] All religions are paths to the same gate. One of the two thieves who was crucified alongside Jesus was repentant of his sins and found mercy when he confessed himself to Jesus, asking Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. Jesus responded to the dying man's request because of his faith, and, even though this man did not have a full understanding of the gospel, Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." [Luke 23:43]

Then he said, "Jesus. remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus said to the man on the cross next to his, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."
[Luke 23:43]

From the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965):


- "Those who know that God founded the Catholic Church through Christ as the necessary means to salvation, yet still refuse to enter it or remain in it, cannot be saved."
- "Those, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their

actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.”

- “In ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him.”

God alone knows the circumstances of our life, the trials and tribulations we experienced, the heavy burdens that we bore. All who come before the heavenly Father will know that they have been judged fairly: “[God] wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” [1 Tim. 2:4]

The Resurrection Body



I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.
[John 3:5,6]

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.
[1Cor. 15:50]

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.
[1Cor. 15:53]

Regeneration

Paul explains that we will be recognizable in our resurrection body, yet it will be better than we can imagine, for it will be made to be incorruptible. We will still have our own personality and individuality, and without infirmity like Jesus' resurrected body. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul discusses the great differences between our earthly bodies and our resurrected bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-54). Contrasting our earthly bodies with the splendor of our heavenly (resurrected) bodies, Paul says, “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised 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”. In short, our resurrected bodies are spiritual, imperishable, and raised in glory and power.

Through the first Adam, we received our natural bodies, perfectly suited to an earthly environment. However, they became perishable as a consequence of the Fall. Due to disobedience, mankind became mortal. Aging, deterioration, and eventual death now affect

all of us. From dust we came, and to dust shall we return (Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 3:20). Our resurrection bodies, on the other hand, will be “raised imperishable.” They will never experience sickness, decay, deterioration, or death. And “when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable... then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:54). As a result of the Fall, we are “sown in dishonor.” We were originally intended to be perfect and in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), but sin has brought dishonor and unrighteousness. Yet believers have the promise that our imperfect and dishonored bodies will one day be raised in glory. Freed from the restrictions imposed by sin, our resurrected bodies will be honorable and perfectly suited for pleasing and praising our Creator throughout eternity.

Our current bodies are characterized by weakness and debility. Our earthly “temples” are undeniably fragile and susceptible to the plethora of diseases that ravage mankind. We are also weakened by sin and temptation. One day, though, our bodies will be raised in power and glory, and we will no longer be subject to the flaws and fragility that pervade life today. The resurrected body will be a spiritual one. Our natural bodies are suited for living in this world, but this is the only realm in which we can live. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). After the resurrection we will have a “spiritual body,” perfectly suited for living in heaven. This does not mean that we will be only spirits, but that our resurrected bodies will not need physical sustenance or depend on natural means of supporting life.

We get a glimpse of what our resurrection bodies will be like when we recall Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances. He still had visible wounds, and his disciples could physically touch Him, yet he was able to travel effortlessly and appear and disappear at will. He could go through walls and doors yet could also eat and drink and sit and talk. Scripture informs us that our “lowly bodies” will be just “like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). Indeed, the physical limitations imposed by sin that hinder our ability to fully serve Him on earth will be forever gone, freeing us to praise and serve and glorify him for eternity.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
[Phil. 3:20,21]