

# When Jesus Returns

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High School – Segment 7  
2010

**Embry Hills church of Christ**  
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**July**

<b>18<sup>th</sup> – Sunday</b>	Lesson 1: Promise of Jesus' Return (Gospels, Acts)
<b>21<sup>st</sup> – Wednesday</b>	Lesson 2: Promise of Jesus' Return (Epistles)
<b>25<sup>th</sup> – Sunday</b>	Lesson 3: When Will Jesus Come?
<b>28<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday</b>	Lesson 4: What Will Jesus' Coming Be Like?

**August**

<b>1<sup>st</sup> – Sunday</b>	Lesson 5: Where Are the Dead Now?
<b>4<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday</b>	Lesson 6: The Resurrection
<b>8<sup>th</sup> – Sunday</b>	Lesson 7: Judgment Day
<b>11<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday</b>	Lesson 8: The Fate of the Earth
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<b>18<sup>th</sup> – Wednesday</b>	Lesson 10: What Will Heaven Be Like?
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# Lesson 1: Promise of Jesus' Return (Gospels and Acts)

## Introduction

1. The uniqueness of man is demonstrated by his ability to contemplate the end of his existence and its implications. This sets him apart from the animals, and God uses this awareness to motivate man to do that which is right.
2. Eschatology: **1:** a branch of theology concerned with the final events in the history of the world or of mankind **2:** a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of mankind... any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 424).
3. Christianity points to a sudden, terminal end of the material universe by divine intervention. What are the events relating to that end, and what are their impact upon us?

## Jesus' Earlier Teaching Regarding a Future Return

The Parable of the Tares – **Mt 13:36-43**. Identify the key features of the parable:

- |                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. ____ Sower of good seed         | a. The devil                     |
| 2. ____ The field                  | b. Sons of the kingdom           |
| 3. ____ Good seeds                 | c. Wailing and gnashing of teeth |
| 4. ____ Tares                      | d. The world                     |
| 5. ____ Sower of tares             | e. The end of this age           |
| 6. ____ The harvest                | f. The Son of Man                |
| 7. ____ The reapers                | g. The righteous                 |
| 8. ____ The furnace of fire        | h. Sons of wicked one            |
| 9. ____ Shine forth in the kingdom | i. Angels                        |

Note that there is no *specific* reference to a personal return of Jesus here; rather, "*The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather ...*" (**13:41**). We know from later sources that this will result from the personal appearance of the Lord, but He does not indicate such at this time.

## Later Indications of a Future Return

A. The master returning from the wedding – **Lk 12:35-40**.

1. How would you characterize the time of the master's return?
2. In what state should the servants remain?
3. How are the prepared servants blessed?

B. Further application on the master, servants – **Lk 12:41-48**. Jesus continues to elaborate on this idea in reference to Peter’s question in **Lk 12:41**.

1. How might unfaithful servants act in view of the master’s delayed return?
2. What is the fate of such an unworthy servant? When will it come?

C. The parable of the minas – **Lk 19:11-27**.

1. Why does Jesus tell this parable?
2. What are the servants to anticipate as they do business in the master’s absence?
3. What is the main principle Jesus is trying to get across in this story?

D. Judgment of the nations – **Mt 25:31-46**.

1. What features are similar between the parable of the tares and this teaching?
2. What does Jesus emphasize as the difference between the sheep and goats? What are the differing fates of the two groups?
3. When will this separation occur?

E. The promise of Jesus’ return to the disciples – **Jn 14:1-3** (also **14:27-29**).

1. How would you describe the emotional state of the disciples at this time?
2. Finish the statements of Jesus:
  - “I go” →
  - “I will come again” →
  - “That where I am” →
3. Note that this promise is extended to all, not merely the apostles – **Jn 12:26**.

## **Book of Acts**

A. The angels’ promise of Jesus’ return at His ascension – **Ac 1:11**.

1. (Finish the phrase): “*This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven ...*”

2. “*In like manner*” indicates similar features between the ascension of Jesus and His return. In what ways do you think His return will be similar?

3. In what ways do you think His return will be different from His ascension?

B. The rest of Acts says little directly about the return of Jesus. It speaks of resurrection and judgment, but the actual return of the Lord is scarcely mentioned. Key passages:

1. What warning does Paul give to the Athenians? (**Ac 17:31-32; cf. 10:42**)

2. What is the assurance of man’s future judgment by Jesus? (**Ac 17:31**)

3. What does Paul say that divides the Jewish high council? (**Ac 23:6-8; 24:15; 21**)

4. What does Paul choose to speak about with Felix? (**Ac 24:25**).

5. What was Felix’s reaction to Paul’s teaching about “the judgment to come?” What can you learn about Felix that might explain his reaction?

C. What Acts emphasizes is the way to receive blessings at Jesus’ return → forgiveness!

### **Additional Questions**

1. What statement concerning Jesus’ return was misunderstood in **Jn 21:22-23**?

2. What does Jesus wonder if He will find when He comes? (**Lk 18:8**)

## Lesson 2: Promise of Jesus' Return (Epistles)

### Introduction

There are too many references to the future return of Jesus in the epistles to note them all in this lesson. Instead, we will consider the various terms which describe that re-turn and some representative passages.

### Come/Coming

The return of Jesus is described by the word “*coming*.” This is from the word *parousia*, “a presence, *para*, with, and *ousia*, being ... denotes both an arrival and a consequent presence with” (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 208). There is an acute sense of expectation in this word; an excitement which we have all felt at the anticipated arrival of a dear one from whom we have been absent for a considerable time.

- A. **1 Th 2:19** – The coming of the Lord is a real event which Paul personally expected to experience along with the Thessalonians. What is Paul’s joy in this event?
  
- B. **1 Th 4:15ff** – What two classes of people is Paul considering in this text?
  
- C. **1 Jn 2:28** – With what attitude should we look forward to this event?

### Appear/Appearing

A concept closely related to the coming of Christ is His appearance. Jesus’ coming will not be some stealthy, unnoticed event as millennial doctrine teaches, but rather He will appear in unmistakable fashion. There is a family of words which describe the coming appearance of Jesus, the root verb of which is *phaino* and the noun *epiphaneia* (English “epiphany”). *Phaino* “signifies in the Active Voice, to shine; in the Passive, to be brought forth into light, to become evident, to appear” (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 64). The word refers to the grace of God, the kingdom, a person’s true character, an angel, of the prophet John – a variety of things that “*come to light*” or are made evident. But ultimately the term applies to the second coming of Christ.

We are assured in a number of passages that Jesus will not only return but will appear:

- A. **Heb 9:28** – The writer of Hebrews makes significant arguments concerning the first coming of Jesus. What He offers to mankind will cause those who take advantage of them to “*eagerly wait*” for His second coming. How does the Hebrew writer here differentiate between the first and second comings of Jesus?
  
- B. **Tit 2:13** – What are Christians doing relative to this day? Who did this in reference to Jesus’ first coming (**Lk 2:25, 38**)?

C. **Col 3:4** – What is Paul’s hope for the Colossians (and us)?

## Revelation

The Scriptures also describe Jesus’ return as a revelation. This contrasts His present invisibility to the naked eye with the eventual exposure of His existence to all of man’s faculties.

“Revelation” is the word *apokalupsis*, an uncovering or unveiling (Vine, Vol. 3, p. 292). Many exhortations arise from the knowledge that Jesus will one day be universally revealed as true Lord and Savior.

A. **2 Th 1:7** – Who besides Jesus will be revealed? From where will Jesus be revealed? What do you conclude from this?

B. **1 Pet 1:7** – What is being tested now in Peter’s readers? What will be the result of this purification?

C. **1 Cor 1:7** – Describe the outlook of Jesus’ followers in this passage. What enables them to have this outlook?

## Additional Questions

1. What promise would even scoffers be aware of in the future (**2 Pet 3:4**)? What is their attitude toward it?

2. What does Paul wish to be found blameless at the coming of the Lord (**1 Th 5:23**)?

3. What will Jesus do at His appearing (**2 Tim 4:1**)?

4. How is Jesus described in **1 Pet 5:4**? What will the faithful receive at that time?

5. What will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus (**1 Pet 1:13**)?

## Lesson 3: When Will Jesus Come?

### Introduction

While there seems to be a clear-cut Scriptural answer to this question, speculations and fanciful opinions abound. In our day of global awareness via satellite news, more attention has been given to the notion that we are seeing “*end time*” signs. We must keep ourselves anchored to the truth on this subject.

### What Has God Revealed

We must accept the fact that God has not revealed everything that our curiosity may raise. There are “*secret things*” which belong to God; they are in His “*own authority*” (**Dt 29:29; Ac 1:7**). God has not revealed the specific time of Jesus’ return. Paul said that Jesus “*will manifest in His own time*” His appearing (**1 Tim 6:14-15**).

### The Day of the Lord

- A. There is such a definite and clear-cut expectation of a future return of Jesus that “*the Day*” (or variations thereof) becomes a typical reference:
- the day of Christ – **Ph 1:10; 2:16; 2 Th 2:2**
  - the day of the Lord – **1 Th 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10**
  - the day of the Lord Jesus – **1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14**
  - the day of Jesus Christ – **Ph 1:6**
  - the day of our Lord Jesus Christ – **1 Cor 1:8**
- B. Note how ingrained this expectation is in other references:
- the Day – **1 Cor 3:13**
  - this Day – **1 Th 5:4**
  - that Day – **2 Th 1:10; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8**
  - day of judgment – **2 Pet 2:9; 3:7; 1 Jn 4:17**
  - judgment of the great day – **Jude 6**
  - the day of God – **2 Pet 3:12**

### As a Thief in the Night

- A. Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians – **1 Th 5:1-6**. What two classes of people are contrasted in this passage? What advantage do believers have as “*sons of light*” and “*sons of the day*”?
- B. Peter agrees with Paul on the return of Christ – **2 Pet 3:10**. The day of the Lord is here tied to the destruction of the material creation (to be discussed later). In spite of skeptics who will deny the Lord’s existence and return (**2 Pet 3:3-4**), the Lord will come “*as a thief*” (the phrase “in the night” is omitted in earlier manuscripts).



- C. Jesus amplifies what “*as a thief*” means – **Mt 24:43-44**. Though **Mt 24** is controversial regarding application to the destruction of Jerusalem or the second coming, what point does Jesus make by referring to the thief?

### **What Is the Christian’s Outlook on the Return of Jesus**

Since we know Jesus is coming, but we don’t know when, with what attitude shall we look toward that day?

- A. Patience – **Jas 5:7**. Though this passage (and **5:8-9**) has been misconstrued by those who say that NT writers expected Jesus’ imminent return, the force of the words suggest that when it does come to pass, the timeliness will be manifest. We must be patient, for not only may the Lord come at any time, we also may be called from this life to meet him at any moment.
- B. Eager waiting – **Heb 9:28; Ph 3:20; 1 Cor 1:7**. This comes from a single Gk. term, *apekdechomai*, and signifies expectant, eager anticipation of a desired event. The TDNT says it “characterizes Christian life as one of expectation of the great climax which gives not only this life but also the whole of creation its meaning” (p. 147). If the return of Christ is only a matter of dreaded fear, we have not yet matured in our appreciation of the event.
- C. Looking for/ hastening the coming – **Tit 2:13; 2 Pet 3:12**. “*Looking for*” translates the Gk. *prosdokao* that “denotes mental direction... *to expect* (whether in thought, in hope, or in fear); *to look for, wait for*” (Thayer, p. 544). Jesus’ return is something to be desired, not just expected. The Christian says, “The sooner, the better.”

### **The Anticipation of Romans 8:18-23**

This is perhaps the definitive passage on our eager anticipation of the Lord’s return. It pictures “*the revealing of the sons of God*” as the culmination of God’s eternal purposes and the end of “*the bondage of corruption.*” The return of the Lord is when all wrong will be made right, all evil will be punished, all suffering (for the elect) will cease. We must look beyond the present through eyes of faith to appreciate the full glory of this event.

### **Additional Questions**

1. Since we know that Jesus is coming, describe our state of alertness. (**1 Th 5:1-6**)
2. What effect should the Lord’s eventual return have upon our thoughts? (**1 Pet 1:13**)
3. What is not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed when Jesus returns? (**Rom 8:18**)
4. What kind of lives should we lead as we look for the appearing of Jesus? (**Tit 2:12-13**)

## Lesson 4: What Will Jesus' Coming Be Like?

### Introduction

In our lifetime we have not seen any divine “intrusion” into this world’s affairs; all visible processes are according to the laws of nature established and upheld by God. It therefore stretches our powers of imagination to think of the sudden appearance of Jesus and to contemplate the end of all existence as we know it. Nevertheless, that day will come and could come at any moment. What has God said about that event?

### The Personal Appearance of the Lord

- A. “*For the Lord **Himself** will descend...*” (1 Th 4:16). The return of Jesus will not be symbolic, representative or otherwise impersonal. Jesus **Himself** is coming; He will **descend**. Wherever heaven is (we humans insist on thinking spatially), Jesus will be seen *descending in the sky*.
- B. “... *when the Lord Jesus is revealed **from heaven** ...*” (2 Th 1:7). Though not visible, Jesus exists now in heaven. But He will eventually be seen again in this realm.
- C. “... *to wait for His Son **from heaven** ...*” (1 Th 1:10). Who else is waiting relative to Jesus’ return (Heb 10:13)?

### The Heralding of the Lord’s Return

- A. The return of Jesus will be a noisy affair. At least three audible elements will herald His coming. What are they? (1 Th 4:16)
- - 
  -
- B. “*Shout*” carries the idea of military command, perhaps relating to the authority of Christ to make all things happen as He wills in that moment.
- C. The angelic voice and the divine trumpet will arrest the attention of all and focus every eye upon the descending Lord. Whatever these things specifically indicate is moot: *we’ll know it when we hear it!*

### Is Jesus Coming Alone

- A. The voice of the archangel presupposes what other passages explicitly say: that Jesus will be accompanied by angelic hosts at His return.
1. Jesus first indicated this in **Mt 16:27** – “*for the Son of Man will come ... with His angels ...*”

2. He further includes them in **Mt 25:31**.

3. These “*mighty angels*” take on an ominous role in the company of Jesus as He unleashes the fires of vengeance on all who do not know God (**2 Th 1:7-8**). This reflects their role as described in the parables of the tares.

B. A significant concept surrounding Jesus’ return involves those who have died before that event.

1. Paul writes to the Thessalonians to calm their spirits on this subject. How does he reassure those who fear for the well-being of their loved ones (**1 Th 4:14**)?

2. This echoes his earlier declaration that Jesus will come \_\_\_\_\_ (**1 Th 3:13**).

3. What does this imply about the process of resurrection?

### The Glory of Christ’s Return

A. Contrast the *inglorious* final days of Jesus before His execution with His return as described in **1 Pet 4:13** and **2 Th 1:10**.

B. “*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*” (**Col 3:4**). Not only will Jesus appear in glory, He will bestow a like glory on His saints and brethren. How would you contrast our present life with this future glory?

### Additional Questions

1. How is the trumpet of God described in **1 Cor 15:52**?

2. How is the appearing of Jesus described in **Tit 2:13**?

3. How should Christians react when Jesus is manifested in glory (**1 Pet 4:13**)?

4. What state will be given to God’s “*many sons*” (**Heb 2:10**)?

## Lesson 5: Where Are the Dead Now?

### Introduction

Though Paul has reassured the Thessalonians that their beloved dead will not be in any way disadvantaged at the return of the Lord, the question naturally arises: “Where are the dead now, and in what state do they exist?” This question not only concerns our loved ones but anticipates our own departure for that realm.

### Only Two States Depicted

**Lk 16:19-31** While this story is in parable form, it (like other parables) rests upon true principles. The parable depicts two mutually exclusive states separated by an impassable gulf:

<u><b>Torment</b></u>	<b>&lt;Afar Off&gt;</b>	<u><b>Abraham’s Bosom</b></u>
Tormented in this flame	<b>&lt;Gulf Fixed&gt;</b>	Comforted

How did Lazarus get to Abraham’s bosom?

What might you conclude about consciousness after death from this story?

What other evidence could you cite to support your answer?

### Notes on Hades/Sheol

The term “*hades*” corresponds to the OT term “*sheol*” and refers to the realm where disembodied spirits reside.

- A. Little light was shed on the after-death condition in the Law of Moses, and Sheol simply referred to the unseen world to which all men and women were gathered. Isaiah depicts the dead as “rolling out the welcome mat” for the king of Babylon who, in spite of his earthly power, will eventually be joining them (**Is 14:9-11, 15**).
- B. David had a sense of going to be with his dead child (**2 Sam 12:23**).
- C. Hades is a different word and place than the final abode of the unbelieving - hell (gehenna). Jesus, Himself, went into Hades and returned from there at His resurrection (**Ac 2:27, 31**). Thus, as Jesus had said, “*the gates of Hades*” did not prevail to prevent Him from establishing His church (**Mt 16:18**).

## “Today, You Will Be with Me in Paradise”

**Lk 23:43** Certainly much error has arisen from this passage as a result of wishful thinking. Whatever the conditions upon which the offer was extended, Jesus is promising immediate transport to “*Paradise*” upon death.

A. What does Paradise mean? In secular usage it referred to the parks and gardens of the Persian kings, walled enclosures of natural beauty cultivated and monitored by royal caretakers. The term was used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) to describe the garden of Eden, the king’s forest (**Neh 2:8**) and Solomon’s gardens (**Ecc 2:5**). Thus Jesus promises the penitent man that both of them would be in Paradise that day.

B. Who had been privileged to see Paradise (**2 Cor 12:4**)?

What else did he call it (**2 Cor 12:2**)?

How did Paul describe this place?

What was given to Paul to temper his pride in what he had seen of Paradise?

C. Both Paradise and heaven are spoken of with great economy in the Scriptures.

## “To Depart and Be with Christ”

**Ph 1:23** Paul writes from the standpoint that, wherever the souls of men go upon death, it is in a very real sense “*with Christ*.” We may, with some justification, speak of an “intermediate place” or a “state of waiting,” but there is no Scriptural basis for separating it from fellowship with Christ.

A. Paul further indicates this in **2 Cor 5:6-8** where he juxtaposes two states of existence:

At home in the body → Absent from the Lord  
Absent from the body → Present with the Lord

B. Further, as Stephen was expiring, “*he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’*” (**Ac 7:59**). He had earlier seen Jesus “*standing at the right hand of God*” (**7:55**), and he now calls upon the Lord to receive him. This is consistent with Paul’s statement that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

C. **Objection:** Some balk at these plain statements because they think it in some way circumvents or nullifies judgment. It does not.

1. Man does not reach a final state of glorification before the return of the Lord, for it is then that the crowns of righteousness will be awarded (**2 Tim 4:8**).

2. Compare **Rev 6:9-11** where martyrs are depicted as conscious, communicating with God, and anticipating future vindication. *“And a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer ...”*.

D. All will be consummated at the Lord’s coming, but that does not preclude our presence with Him in some fashion until that day. Too, let us not be overly troubled by our future state, but with Jesus say, *“Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit” (Lk 23:46)*. He will care for us in the most appropriate manner.

### **What about Purgatory and Reincarnation**

A. Purgatory is the Catholic doctrine of an intermediate state of wrath and punishment after death wherein one’s sins can yet be atoned for.

1. The doctrine was officially incorporated by the council of Florence in 1438. After sufficient financial payment by living loved ones, so the Catholics teach, the soul may finally be released from Purgatory into heaven itself.

2. What is judgment based on according to **2 Cor 5:10**? Whose actions will be judged (**1 Pet 1:17; Rom 2:6-10**)?

3. “Purgatory,” either as a place or a concept, is not mentioned in the Bible.

B. Reincarnation is a tenet of Hinduism. This doctrine holds that, after death, the spirit is continually “recycled” in an ongoing process of purification. In other words, the dead are here... just in different forms. Depending upon one’s karma (the principle that one’s existence is exactly what he deserves based upon past life experience), one may come back in his next life as a worm or a tree. If one proves to be a very good worm, then in his next life he may get to be a rock star or a prince.

C. Both of these “second chance” heresies are subversive to true spirituality, for they deflect a legitimate fear of death and deemphasize personal responsibility. The more dangerous of the two in our society is reincarnation, for it has been embraced by many in the Hollywood establishment who are able to effectively market it among the popular culture.

## Lesson 6: The Resurrection

### Introduction

When the apostles went forth preaching the kingdom, the concept of resurrection was central to their message. They placed heavy emphasis upon the resurrection of Jesus (**Ac 2:30-32; 3:15; 4:10; 10:39-41; 13:29-37; 17:31-32** etc.), and from that event declared that all men would be likewise raised at the last day (**Ac 26:8, 23**).

### One Resurrection

Premillennial doctrine fragments the resurrection into various phases separated by hundreds of years and events such as the tribulation, the thousand-year reign and the loosing of Satan. These fanciful doctrines ignore the plain language which indicates that there is to be but one resurrection, and it will take place at the sudden, cataclysmic end of the creation at the return of Jesus. There is *one* resurrection in which *all*, both good and evil, will be raised (**Jn 5:28**).

### What Happens at the Resurrection

A. The definitive passage on resurrection is **1 Cor 15**. Part of the confusion over the resurrection arises from the fact that several NT passages only deal with the resurrection from the standpoint of what will happen to the righteous. For example, **1 Cor 15:23** only mentions the resurrection of *“those who are Christ’s at His coming.”* Those who are **not** Christ’s will also be raised, but Paul is not concerned with them at this point. Note further:

1. What is the *“it”* repeatedly mentioned in **1 Cor 15:42-44a**? How does a passage like **Gn 18:14** factor in to this truth?
2. What process then occurs (**1 Cor 15:52-54**)?
3. Who shall we then resemble (**1 Cor 15:47-49; 1 Jn 3:2; Ph 3:21**)?

B. Consider additional elements from **1 Th 4:13-18**. This passage was written to assure the Thessalonians that at the resurrection there would be joint participation between them and those who had already died.

1. Who is the Lord bringing with Him (**1 Th 4:14**)? Who will rise first (**1 Th 4:16**)?
2. What happens next (**4:17**)? Where does the Bible speak of Jesus stepping foot upon the earth when He returns?
3. What is asserted in the last sentence of **1 Th 4:17**? Note that the picture of return is not so that Jesus can be here with us but that we may be taken to where He is.

## A House Not Made with Hands

**2 Cor 5:1-8** Assurance is here given that no matter the state of the physical body in this life, we will be given an adequate habitation in heaven.

- A. The deterioration of the body by natural course, or the violence done to it from without, is traumatic. In this life we become so defined by our body, but how should we learn to look at it (**2 Cor 5:1, 4**)?
- B. What intense desire develops within the heart of the Christian due to our human vulnerability and suffering (**2 Cor 5:2, 4**)?
- C. What a sense of liberty, of unencumbered strength and total soundness is fostered by the promise of resurrection and revitalization. Christians can rightly set their hopes not only upon a future *location* (heaven) but a *condition* (a glorious body).

## Attaining the Resurrection

**Phil 3:8-11** Paul vows that he will forfeit anything that interferes with his relationship with Christ. What does Paul count “loss” and “rubbish” (**3:8**)?

- A. Paul is awed by Jesus’ suffering, death and the “*power of His resurrection*” (**3:10**). When Paul speaks of his hope to attain the resurrection from the dead (**3:11**), what does he mean – since *all* are going to be resurrected in the end?

## Denial of the Resurrection

- A. Some Corinthians had been entertaining the idea that there is no resurrection (**1 Cor 15:12**). List some consequences of such a doctrine:

- **1 Cor 15:13, 16** –
- **1 Cor 15:14** –
- **1 Co 15:15** –
- **1 Cor 15:17** –
- **1 Cor 15:18** –
- **1 Cor 15:19** –
- **1 Cor 15:32** –



B. The same God who promised to raise Jesus from the dead, and did, has promised to raise all men, and will (**1 Cor 15:20, 23; 6:14**).

1. In what concept did Paul have the utmost belief (**2 Cor 4:13-14**)?

### **Additional Questions**

1. Discuss: Does the NT prescribe a particular method of disposing of a dead body? Is cremation approved? What about burial at sea?

2. How does Paul describe the difference between the natural body and the spiritual body (**1 Cor 15:36-38**)?

3. What effect should knowledge of the resurrection have upon us (**1 Th 4:18**)?

## Lesson 7: Judgment Day

### Introduction

References are sprinkled throughout the NT of a coming day of accountability for all mankind. From a human standpoint, there are many wrongs that are never righted; there are injustices which go unpunished. But be aware: *“He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Ac 17:31)*. What is the guarantee of coming judgment?

### Everyone Will Appear

A. Everyone will stand before Christ - **2 Cor 5:10**

1. Where is Christ sitting in this passage?
2. Are some, perhaps elders, exempt from this examination (**Heb 13:17**)?

B. What two classes will be judged according to **1 Pet 4:5**?

1. Who specifically is subject to judgment in this passage?
2. What will they give to the Lord?

C. Nothing will be hidden

1. What will each mentally responsible person give to God (**Rom 14:12**)?
2. What will be revealed by the penetrating knowledge of Christ (**1 Cor 4:5; Rom 2:16**; cf. **Heb 4:13**)?
3. Whose judgment had Paul mentioned in **1 Cor 4:3-4**?
4. For what will we give answer according to **Mt 12:36**?

### Jesus Will Be the Judge

A. As indicated in a couple of the passages already examined (**Ac 17:31; 2 Cor 5:10**), Jesus Christ will be the instrument of God’s judgment. He has been *“ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead” (Ac 10:42)*.

1. Jesus will judge “*at His appearing*” – **2 Tim 4:1**. Again, this cements the time of future judgment. Considered from a chronological point of view, it is not clear where in the sequence of events this judgment takes place.
2. Is it an “instantaneous” affair? [It is difficult to conceive of events which are unaffected by the passing of time, since this arrangement is all we know.]
3. Is it a formal answering of each individual who has ever lived? Or is the judgment merely the declaration of what has already been determined in the mind of the Lord based on the evidence of each one’s earthly life? These are some of the details about which we may be curious but uninformed.

B. What standard of judgment will be used to evaluate men (**Jn 12:48**)?

1. Does Jesus limit this standard to a certain class, or is it universal?
2. On what day does the judgment occur?

C. We must note here a rather obscure concept mentioned in the NT: that saints will be involved in the judgment of angels and the world (**1 Cor 6:2-3**; cf. **Mt 19:28**; **Lk 22:29-30**). Paul spoke to the Corinthians as if this were common knowledge, but the Scriptures do not shed much light on the process or significance of this activity.

1. In this life, however, we must be careful not to encroach upon Christ’s judgment. Some judgments are commanded, but we are warned in various passages not to judge improperly; i.e., the motives of man not manifest in their behavior (**Mt 7:1**; **Rom 14:10-13**).
2. Some things we cannot know. Those things outside of our senses must be left to the Lord who can make perfect judgments.

### **The Wicked Reserved for Judgment**

**2 Pet 2:9** Peter affirms that the unjust are reserved “*under punishment for the day of judgment*” (**comp. 3:7**). To what is the delay in judgment attributed (**2 Pet 3:9**)?

### **Boldness in the Day of Judgment**

**1 Jn 4:17** As dreaded as the judgment of the Lord is, there is a way to approach it with boldness. The key is love, an unfeigned and permeating love for God that leads one to submit to His will with every fiber of our being. That kind of love will seek out man’s only hope for acquittal: *forgiveness*.

If we stand before God with sin on our account, there will be no explanations or mitigating circumstances which will cause God to overlook our transgressions. But if we are forgiven of our sins, then we have boldness because we know that the only basis for rejection by God is absent.

A. What concepts does John associate with the coming judgment in **1 Jn 2:28**? How should the Christian look at this future reality?

B. **Rom 8:1** – *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus ...”*. These are powerful words ... *“no condemnation”*. To whom? To those *“in Christ Jesus”*. Can we know if we are in Christ? Can we know if we are a Christian? Can we know if we are saved? Can we know that we will be acquitted at the judgment? It’s all the same question.

C. An example of confidence: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day ...”* (**2 Tim 4:7-8**).

1. But people often excuse this example by saying: “Yes, but Paul knew he was saved because the Holy Spirit revealed it to him when he wrote Second Timothy.” But this overlooks the last part of the verse: *“... and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*
2. It’s not just the *crown* but the *assurance* that belongs to all who love the Lord. If we say that God is no respecter of persons (and we do), then how will we consistently say that God told Paul he was saved and left everyone else in doubt – especially when this contradicts what John said about confidence and boldness?

### Additional Questions

1. What reaction did the thought of going before Christ’s judgment seat unprepared have upon Paul (**2 Cor 5:11**)? What was Paul’s aim in view of this (**2 Cor 5:9**)?
2. What is our only hope of acquittal before the judgment seat of Christ?
3. How is God’s judgment against ungodliness described (**Rom 1:32**)?
4. In contrast to the teaching of reincarnation, how many times does an individual die before his/her judgment (**Heb 9:27**)?

## Lesson 8: The Fate of the Earth

### Introduction

Various doctrinal schemes incorporate a refurbished earth in the overall picture of future glory. It seems hard for some to let this creation go, to see it as it was intended – a temporary home for mankind while he pursues spiritual growth. But the Bible clearly states in both literal and poetic language that the earth and the material universe in which it is found will be disposed of. The focus of the future is heaven, not the earth.

### The Folding of the Garments

A. **Heb 1:10-12** What is the main premise of the Hebrew writer in chapter 1?

1. How does he use **Ps 102:25-27** in his argument?

B. How are Jesus and the creation contrasted in **1:11a**? Why the difference?

C. The illustration of creation's demise is that of a garment, a cloak or wrap, that is taken off and folded. Its purpose has been fulfilled; it is no longer to be worn. Note that the argument demands the cessation of the earth, for the contrast is Jesus whose "*years will not fail*" (**1:12**).

1. Who will remain when the earth is folded like a garment?

### A Fiery Cataclysm

If any question remains about the degree to which the creation will be terminated (will it just be left in ruins? will it be temporarily interrupted? will it be refurbished for idealistic or spiritual habitation?) Peter gives as clear and thorough a description as possible in **2 Pet 3:3-13**?

A. Certain destruction (**3:3-9**). In spite of scoffers who fail to distinguish the patience of God from His non-existence, "*the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word, reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men*" (**3:7**).

1. "*By the same word*" refers to what event from antiquity?

2. This is the only point of comparison between the flood and the final destruction. Some argue that as the flood did not literally obliterate the planet but cleansed it, so the fire of judgment will not consume the earth but renew it. This corrupts Peter's reference to the example of Noah as well as the detailed description of the destruction in the following words.

B. Complete destruction (**3:10-12**). The heavens will pass away; the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and its works will be burned up.

1. A divinely sparked fire will consume the very building blocks of creation (“*elements*” – “signifies any first things from which others in a series, or a composite whole, take their rise” [Vine, Vol. 2, p. 22]).
2. All physical processes and human endeavors – intentions, plans, hopes, ambitions – will come to a screeching halt in an exposing, destructive fire.
3. All creation as we know it will be “*dissolved*”; i.e., the forces that bind the elements of the universe together and make it orderly, habitable and intact will be loosed. What a frightening prospect this is, and the heart of faith accepts the reality of it and makes preparation for that day.

C. Permanent destruction (**3:13**). A “*new heavens and a new earth*” will be our dwelling place in eternity; the old environment is gone.

1. Some will ignore the absolute language just employed by Peter and argue (hope?) from these verses that the earth will somehow be renovated. But the Hebrew writer made it clear that “*here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come*” (**13:14**). This city is described as “*the heavenly Jerusalem*” (**12:22**); i.e., the physical creation will be “*exchanged*” (**Heb 1:12** – *allasso*, “to make other than it is”) for a heavenly home.
2. But why is the phrase “*new heavens and new earth*” used? Doesn’t it imply that the earth will still be here in the future, albeit in another form? The phrase is an OT Hebraism which suggests an order or dispensation. For example, in **Is 65:17**, in reference to what God was going to do through the Messiah, He said, “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered to come to mind.*” God didn’t *literally* recreate or refurbish the planet but instituted a new order of life, worship, covenant, etc. through His Son. This wholesale change of orientation is called “*new heavens and new earth*,” just as our future spiritual habitation of heaven is called “*new heavens and new earth*” by Peter.
3. This figure of speech is called **topographia** and is a figure “which adds something to what is said by describing a place” (Bullinger, p. 453). Illustration: A similar usage: someone in a beautiful jungle setting might say: “This is truly Eden.”

## All Signs Point Heavenward

A. The NT focuses the Christian’s future hope away from this earth and toward the dwelling place of God.

1. “*Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal*” (**Mt 6:20**).
2. We anticipate “*a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (**2 Cor 5:1**).
3. “*For our citizenship is in heaven*” (**Ph 3:20**).

4. Paul's burning desire was "*to depart and be with Christ*" (**Ph 1:23**).

5. We should "*seek those things which are above, where Christ is ... set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*" (**Col 3:1-2**).

B. Such quotes could be multiplied, but skeptics will remain unconvinced. While they continue to hope for some utopic remodeled earth, the Lord will lead His saints home as universe is reduced to cinders.

### **Additional Questions**

1. What will happen to the things that can be shaken (**Heb 12:27**)? What will remain?

2. What was the psalmist facing when he wrote **Ps 102:23-27**?

3. What guarantees that we will inhabit "*new heavens and a new earth*" (**2 Pet 3:13**)? What is said to dwell here?

4. For what does the creation "*eagerly wait*" (**Rom 8:19**)?

## Lesson 9: What Will Hell Be Like?

### Introduction

Recently there has been a revival of an age-old debate: Just what will hell be like? Is it a real place? Is there such a thing as eternal suffering? As in all issues of spiritual import, we must submit our opinions and desires to the facts as God has revealed them. One thing is certain: by the descriptions, hell is not a place we would want to be.

### What Is Hell

Hell (in the Gk. *geenna*, transliterated gehenna) is the eternal abode of those who have departed earthly life out of fellowship with God. The Scriptures do not indicate that such people are annihilated; i.e., removed from existence, but that they are eternally preserved in a state of suffering. This is the consequence of rebelling against God.

### Various Descriptive Terms

A. Hell is often described as a place of \_\_\_\_\_:

1. "... where their worm does not die and the \_\_\_\_\_" **Mk 9:44, 46, 48.**
2. "... will cast them into the \_\_\_\_\_" **Mt 13:42, 50.**
3. "... to be cast into the \_\_\_\_\_ ... into \_\_\_\_\_" **Mt 18:8-9.**

B. The image of fire conjures up extreme suffering:

1. "... that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am \_\_\_\_\_" **Lk 16:24.**
2. "There will be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_" **Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk 13:28.**
3. "There will be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_" **Mt 13:42, 50.**

C. This suffering is amplified by references to "darkness." An interesting contrast occurs here: the burning of fire but the absence of light.

1. "... will be cast into outer darkness" **Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30.** Robertson explains this phrase: "like our 'further out,' the darkness outside the limits of the lighted palace ... The repeated article makes it bolder and more impressive, 'the darkness the outside,' there where the wailing and gnashing of teeth is heard in the thick blackness of night" (**Word Pictures**, Vol. 1, p. 65).
2. "to whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever" **2 Pet 2:17.**
3. "... for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" **Jude 13.**



## The Fire of Judgment and Hell Is Tied to the Wrath and Vengeance of God

A. "... in flaming fire taking \_\_\_\_\_ ..." **2 Th 1:8**.

1. Where does the punishment of everlasting destruction take place (**2 Th 1:9**)?

B. "... suffering the \_\_\_\_\_ of eternal fire" **Jude 7**.

C. "... a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and \_\_\_\_\_ which will devour the adversaries" **Heb 10:27**.

D. Other passages stress the coming wrath of God upon the disobedient: **Rom 1:18; 2:5**

1. What four items of God's displeasure are listed in **Rom 2:8-9**?

2. Upon whom does the wrath of God abide in **Jn 3:36**?

3. What is coming upon the sons of disobedience (**Eph 5:6; Col 3:6**)?

## A Place of Death and Destruction

Some take comfort in the fact that the demise of the unfaithful is referred to as death or destruction. They take this to mean that the future state of such will be annihilation or cessation of existence. "God," they reason, "is a God of love and would never punish His creatures eternally." While personally consoling, this notion does not explain the many passages which refer to "eternal" punishment. Note also Vine's definition of "destruction": "The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being" (**Expository Dictionary**, Vol. 1, p. 302).

A. "... wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction ..." **Mt 7:13**.

B. "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him" **1 Cor 3:17**.

C. "When they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes ..." **1 Th 5:3**.

D. "For the end of those things is death ... the wages of sin is death" **Rom 6:21, 23**; (also **8:2, 6, 13**).

E. "... he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death" **Jas 5:20**.

## Hell: A Place We Don't Want to Be

We can debate the literal or figurative aspects of hell, but the bottom line is that to be in hell is to be away from God and everything that is good, righteous, joyful and meaningful. No grace, no mercy, no love, no divine power, no light, no revelation, no happy association – hell is the very antithesis of everything noble and lovely and godly. And if the absence of goodness is not punishment enough, the Scriptures describe unimaginable suffering upon those who dwell there. Our curiosity may not be completely satisfied, but we have enough information to want to avoid spending an eternity in hell.

## **Additional Questions**

1. How would you answer the belief that hell is merely annihilation or ceasing to exist?
2. In the article on the next page, how would you respond to the view of Theodore Tsitsilianos about hell (second column, last paragraph)?
3. Check a concordance and answer this question: Who used the term "gehenna" more often than anyone else in the NT?

# Debate about reality of hell continues

## Some believe it's abstract state of mind

By STEPHANIE ALLMON  
C.1999 CNN NEWS SERVICE

WACO, Texas — You're led down a dark tunnel into a blacked basement. Sounds of moaning and screaming come from behind walls. Learning thirst, physical torment and a longing to be with God.

Welcome to hell — at least one version.

The Family Worship Center in Waco uses this scenario, a "hell house," to illustrate what church members believe hell is: A literal place of torment for people who reject Jesus as a savior.

But is hell a place or a state of mind?

That question, long debated by theologians, philosophers and everyday believers, resurfaced this summer when Pope John Paul II shocked some by referring to hell as "the state of those who freely and definitely separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy."

After this statement, some religious leaders expressed misgivings about the implication that hell is an

abstract separation from God, rather than a literal lake of fire as described in the biblical book of Revelation.

Rev. Timothy Vaverek, pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, said the pope's statement has been taken out of context, and that Roman Catholics do believe in hell as more than a state of mind.

"The joy in heaven and suffering in hell is spiritual and physical, because we are creatures that are made of both body and soul," Vaverek said. "There will be a resurrection of the body. But even in this life, our greatest joys and sufferings are spiritual in nature."

Most of the world's religions include a concept of hell, or eternal damnation for evil souls, in their beliefs, although the reality of hell has taken on many representations. The most popular images of the Christian view of hell include flames and the devil ruling the underworld with a pitchfork in hand.

But these images are not enough to understand hell, Vaverek says, because no one knows what hell looks like. And some say images of fire and physical torment are wrong altogether.

"When the soul leaves the body, physicalness ceases to exist, so we're talking about the spiritual realm," said Rev. Theodore Tishler, pastor at St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in Waco. "We don't really believe there's a physical hell."

**'The joy in heaven and suffering in hell is spiritual and physical, because we are creatures that are made of both body and soul. There will be a resurrection of the body. But even in this life, our greatest joys and sufferings are spiritual in nature.'**

— Rev. Timothy Vaverek, pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Waco, Texas

Bob Patterson, distinguished professor of religion at Baylor University, said people must ask a question that cannot be answered by anyone who has not been to hell: If separation from God starts in this life, and if God sustains a person in separation after death, what is that separation after death, what is that like?

"This remains an unsettled question," Patterson said.

Patterson said hell is a metaphor for the worst condition one can imagine. For instance, Americans might see hell as an atomic meltdown, he said. But hell as a physical or spiritual place is often an indoctrinated belief.

The physicality of hell is only one point of contention among Christians. Some believe that to avoid hell, people must live a good life; others believe a faith in Jesus Christ is enough.

One Christian belief is that Jesus spent time in hell after he died on the cross and before he rose on Easter morning. And most say God gave humans free will to choose whether they will end up in heaven or hell.

"The Bible says hell is made for Satan and his angels, not for people," Family Worship Center pastor Darrell Price said. "I believe he weeps over people that are in hell, but at the same time is a holy and righteous God. Hell is a real place, but nobody has to go there."

Most Bible scholars agree that hell is place of eternal torment where God does not exist.

"Whatever metaphor you use, it does stand for something quite real, and that is a broken or no relationship with God," Patterson said.

National polls show that 70 percent of Americans believe in heaven, while only 50 percent believe in hell, and few believe they

are going to hell themselves, according to the Religious News Service.

"Maybe the world doesn't want to believe in hell because they don't want to face that there are other consequences for what they might be involved in," said John Wachsmann, senior pastor of Church on the Rock in Waco.

— N.Y. Times News Service

# Lesson 10: What Will Heaven Be Like?

## How Life Hereafter Is Described

Read each passage on the left and place it in the most appropriate box to the right:

**Mt 5:12**  
**Mt 6:20**  
**Mt 13:43**  
**Mt 22:30**  
**Lk 18:30**  
**Jn 3:16**  
**Jn 5:24**  
**Jn 14:3**  
**Jn 17:3**  
**Rom 2:7**  
**Rom 8:18**  
**Eph 1:18**  
**Col 3:4**  
**1 Th 2:12**  
**1 Th 4:17**  
**1 Th 5:10**  
**2 Th 2:14**  
**2 Tim 1:10**  
**2 Tim 4:1**  
**2 Tim 4:18**  
**Heb 4:1, 9**  
**Heb 10:34**  
**Jas 2:5**  
**1 Pet 1:4**  
**1 Pet 5:4**  
**2 Pet 1:11**  
**1 Jn 1:3**

### Rewards/Treasures

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Heavenly Kingdom

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Eternal Life

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Like Angels

- 1.

### Fellowship with God

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Divine Glory

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

### Rest

- 1.

Somewhat surprisingly, little detail is given in the Scriptures about the greatest hope and ambition of mankind: to be in heaven after earthly life ceases. Since God asks us to deny ourselves, live consecrated lives for Him, even die to maintain His honor if necessary, it is only reasonable to expect that He would motivate us by elaborate descriptions of our reward for doing so. However, such is not God's way. But what He **does** say about heaven is enough to make the godly man seek that goal.

### **Deferred Reward**

We live out our earthly lives according to duty, sacrifice and hardship even as our hearts and hopes are centered elsewhere. There is work to be done here and now. We are motivated to engage in this work in part by the rewards that have been promised, but we must not allow ourselves to become distracted by the rewards. We must set our sights firmly upon heaven and until we get there work diligently for the Lord.

### **Additional Questions**

1. What has brought immortality to light (**2 Tim 1:10**)?
2. What will the poor in heart enjoy (**Mt 5:8**)?
3. Christians are heirs according to what hope (**Tit 3:7**)?
4. Who will sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom (**Mt 8:11**)?
5. How does Jesus describe eternal life in **Jn 17:3**?
6. How may we take comfort when deprived of material possessions (**Heb 10:34**)?
7. To whom does God promise participation in His kingdom (**Jas 2:5**)?
8. Entrance into the kingdom is supplied abundantly/sparingly (circle one).
9. According to Jesus, how is angelic life in heaven different from earthly life (**Mt 22:30**)?

## Lesson 11: What If My Loved Ones Are Lost?

### Introduction

Anyone with the love and concern for others that God Himself has for His creatures will naturally be anxious about the eternal welfare of family and friends. We can be so emotionally bonded to people that the very thought of their eternal suffering can cause deep distress – even possibly to the point of driving us from God. How can we deal effectively with these feelings?

### Coping Mechanisms

Death is such a traumatic and terminal event that the survivors are often desperate to comfort themselves any way they can – even to the point of denying Scripture. This is a perfect opportunity for Satan to promote false notions about future existence. List three things worldly people say about their loved one in order to cope with their death and how this perspective often misses the point:

- 
- 
- 

### Some Well-Meaning but Misplaced Answers

- “You shouldn’t worry about that.” Why is this misguided?
- “You won’t think about that in heaven.” What is wrong with this answer?
- “God may make an exception for your loved one.” How would you respond?

### Rational Answers Which Don’t Always Help a Very Emotional Issue

- “God doesn’t **owe** anyone salvation; it is by grace based upon condition.” Assess this answer.
- “What is to be gained by destroying yourself?” Assess.
- “There’s nothing you can do about their eternal welfare now.” Assess.
- “If everyone felt the way you do, then no one would go to heaven. Everyone has loved ones who have not obeyed the gospel.” Assess.

## Other Suggested Approaches

These may not be any more effective than other suggestions, for this issue is a highly emotional one and emotions cloud the reason.

- “What would \_\_\_\_\_ have wanted you to do?” The **living** may say, “If they are not in heaven, then I don’t want to be there either,” but what do the **dead** say (**Lk 16:27-28**)? What advantage does this answer have?
- “None of us can make choices for other people.” How does the element of free will come into play?
- “It is beyond our ability to render judgment in specific cases.” How do we balance the clear teaching of Scripture against human inability to render perfect judgments?
- “God’s judgments are *always* right.” Where is the focus in this answer? Where is it not?
- “We must want to please God more than anyone or anything else.” How does Paul handle the alienation of his Jewish brethren from God (**Rom 9:1-3; 10:1-3**)? If we really loved the person who has died in an uncertain state, what should we do relative to the still-living loved ones of the deceased?

## Conclusion

As with any other obstacle which Satan may throw in the way of a person’s salvation, truth must take precedence in the heart of the believer and respect for God and His laws must put unsettled emotions to rest. The fact is all believers will have loved ones who will choose not to obey God and thus be lost. But we must not let that interfere with our own eternal destiny.

Years ago a lady lost her young son in a tragic automobile accident. In her distress over his death (the son had displayed no spiritual interest) she stopped observing the Lord’s Supper. When questioned about this, she dissolved in tears and said, “I just feel I am condemning him by taking the Lord’s Supper.” Her emotions had totally clouded the real issue. She couldn’t condemn her son by her actions; he had done that to himself (if he died in a lost condition, which he apparently did). All she was doing was placing her own soul in jeopardy by willful disobedience. What a compounding of tragedy! To whose benefit would it be if she were lost along with her son?!

While we may be able to see the senselessness of this in another situation, when it happens to us we may feel differently. Part of the challenge of faith is to continue to believe what we know is right even when our emotions tell us something different.

The thought of loved ones suffering eternally is distressing. But it doesn't change our own obligations to do what is right. *"He who loves father or mother ... son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me"* (**Mt 10:37**).

### **Additional Questions**

1. How did Jesus feel about the city of Jerusalem which had continually rejected God through the centuries (**Mt 23:37-38**)?
2. God will repay evil men according to what (**2 Tim 4:14**)?
3. What is the nature of condemnation for those who slander the gospel (**Rom 3:8**)?
4. What kind of judgment does God render, even if it results in eternal death (**Rom 2:5; 2 Th 1:6**)?
5. How do strong emotions tend to affect our reasoning skills?
6. How likely is it for any Christian that everyone he/she loves will be saved? How might this affect our outlook?
7. T/F Jesus experienced unbelief even in His own immediate family (cite passage for your answer: \_\_\_\_\_).



## Lesson 12: Errors of Premillennialism

### Introduction

Some form of premillennial error exists in nearly every religious denomination. Even churches of Christ struggled with this doctrine in the early twentieth century. Errors concerning the return of Christ are essentially the result of 1) ignorance and misuse of prophetic Scriptures, and 2) fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the kingdom Jesus has established.

### Basic Concepts of Premillennialism

While premillennialism is a set of doctrines constantly in flux, we can identify some basic concepts common to most of these false systems:

#### *A Thousand-Year Reign of Christ*

Millennialism proposes a future reign of Christ on the earth for one thousand years. This rule will emanate from Jerusalem where Jesus will be literally enthroned. Premillennialism is the most common form of millennial doctrine. It teaches that Jesus' second coming precedes the thousand year reign. Postmillennialism, on the other hand, asserts that the kingdom will gradually come into existence via the conversion of the whole world and will be followed by Jesus' second coming.

#### *The Kingdom Not Established*

Premillennial doctrine teaches that the church of today is not an earthly expression of the kingdom/rule of Christ in heaven. Premillennialism holds that Jesus' rejection by the Jews was an unforeseen event. Thus, the OT prophets who spoke of the coming kingdom did not have reference to the church. Instead, premillennialists teach that God postponed His plan to establish the kingdom and erected the church as a temporary measure until, at a future date, the kingdom will come into being. Listen to this premillennial writer:

In the parables (**Mt 13:1-50**) the Lord ... announces the inception of an entirely new, unheralded, and unexpected program – the church (**Mt 16:13-20**). He prepares the disciples for a long delay in the kingdom program as it relates to Israel (**Lk 19:11-27**). He promises the second advent, at which time the kingdom program with Israel will be resumed (**Mt 24:27-31**) ... Thus we see the Lord is preparing the disciples for the withdrawal of the offer of the kingdom and the institution of a new program and age before the kingdom program is consummated ... The church is manifestly an interruption of God's program for Israel, which was not brought into being until Israel's rejection of the offer of the Kingdom (Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, quoted from Rodney Miller's *Lion & Lamb on Planet Earth*, p. 44).

#### *The Rapture*

This well-known phrase has reference to the end of the "church age." As noted above, premillennialists teach that the church age was temporary. When it comes to an end, God will "rapture" or transport the church-age saints away from the earth. This involves not only the

ascension of those living but the resurrection from the dead of **the righteous only** who had lived during the church age. The wicked remain entombed until a later time, and the resurrection of Old Testament saints occurs later.

### *The Tribulation*

This is a seven-year period between the rapture of the saints and the commencement of the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. During this time only evil people are upon the earth; the Holy Spirit, and thus all righteous influence, is taken away. This is to be a time of extreme wickedness, and the Anti-Christ rises to dominance.

### *The Battle of Armageddon*

This great conflict comes at the end of the seven-year tribulation. In this battle, world forces amass to attack Israel, but Jesus gloriously appears to defend the land. The premillennial explanations of this battle change constantly because the balance of power in the world changes. Their predictions, which always fail to come true, must be continually revised to reflect the current state of affairs in the world.

### *The Thousand-Year Reign*

Premillennialists teach that the earth will be “revamped” and that it will be restored to its Garden of Eden state. All harmful elements will be removed: no deserts, no predators, no natural catastrophes. Jerusalem will be the center of earth’s activities, and the Jews will be a restored people. John Walvoord, an eminent premillennialist, says:

*There is something fundamentally wrong with the world. It will be in war and turmoil and trouble until a new world order comes. This cannot be fulfilled until Christ returns and sets up His Kingdom. Then, and then alone, nations of the world will abandon their instruction of war. Then, and only then, will there be peace and tranquility over all the world for a thousand years as Christ reigns on earth (The Return of the Lord, as quoted in Miller’s Lion & Lamb, p. 253).*

### *Other Elements:*

Premillennialists also believe things as outlandish as the restoration of the Roman Empire preceding and during the tribulation. They believe that Judaism will be restored, including the rebuilding of the temple according to the pattern of Ezekiel. Satan will be released at the end of the millennium to wreak havoc on the kingdom but will be eternally defeated. At the end of the millennium, the wicked will be raised and judged, sentenced to eternal destruction.

### **Answering the Premillennialists**

The sloppy scholarship, reading into texts, baseless assertions, and flagrant contradictions among premillennialists is shocking. It is an elaborate system of misapplied passages woven together to support ideas and events that contradict plain Scripture. And there are many people eager to swallow it all without critical examination. Note the following observations which are contrary to premillennialism:

### *The Church*

1. Premillennialists charge that the church was an “afterthought,” that it was only incorporated into the scheme of events after the Jews rejected Jesus and His kingdom. How does **Eph 3:10-11** refute this idea?
2. There is an obvious focus upon the events which transpire in **Acts 2**. Jesus had spoken early about His “kingdom” coming, but later He speaks of building His “church” (**Mt 16:18**). Premillennialism says a shift occurred and Jesus withdrew his offer of a kingdom and substituted the church. How would you answer this?

### *The Kingdom*

1. Premillennialists assert that the kingdom does not exist, that Jesus withdrew the offer of the kingdom because of Jewish unbelief. However, to a group of Jewish readers, what does the Hebrew writer say we have received (**Heb 12:28**)?
2. Furthermore, what does Paul say the Colossians had been delivered from and translated into (**Col 1:13**)? How is this possible if the offer of the kingdom had been withdrawn?
3. How does Paul describe the kingdom relative to contemporary issues facing the Roman brethren (**Rom 14:17**)?
4. What does Paul say is evidence of kingdom authority (**1 Cor 4:20**)? Did he claim to have such power (**2 Cor 12:12**)?
5. What does the apostle John claim to be in despite his exile on Patmos (**Rev 1:9**)?
6. When Jesus returns, it will not be to **establish** a kingdom but to **relinquish** it (**1 Cor 15:23-28**).
  - a. What did the nobleman go to a far country to *receive* (**Lk 19:12**)?
  - b. According to Daniel’s prophecy, where did the one like the Son of Man go to receive His kingdom (**Dn 7:13-14**)? How does this fit the events of Jesus’ life?

### *The Rejection, Death of Christ*

This “unexpected” turn of events, according to the premillennialists, was completely foretold in the Old Testament.

1. What does Peter say about it in the Pentecost sermon (**Ac 2:23**)?
2. In his very next recorded teaching, what does he say about Jesus (**Ac 3:20**)?

3. How do the apostles later assess the turn of events that befell Jesus (**Ac 4:27-28**)?
4. What did Jesus Himself say on the subject (**Lk 24:25-27**)?
5. Does this sound like an unanticipated event to you? What do you think of **any** doctrine that is based on the premise that God made a mistake or didn't foresee such a critical eventuality as the rejection of the Messiah?

### *The Land Promise*

A major assertion of premillennialism is that God never fulfilled His promise to Abraham that his descendants would receive the land as promised. They waffle all over this point, saying that Israel only received part of the land, that it never played out to be all God intended, that He gave it to them perpetually, etc. But the heart of their argument is that *God didn't keep His promise* (Come to think of it, these premillennial folks don't think too highly of God, do they?!). However, note these plain statements of Scripture:

1. **Jsh 21:43-45** How much land did God give to Israel? What suggests that there is no incompleteness to what has transpired? (See also **Jsh 23:14; 11:23**)
2. **1 Kgs 8:56** Several hundred years later, how does Solomon assess the state of affairs?

### *The Throne of David*

Premillennialists deny that Jesus is now sitting and reigning on the throne of David as indicated in Old Testament prophecy. They differentiate between the throne of God, on which they say Jesus now sits, and the throne of David, on which He will sit in the millennium. However, Peter, in the very first gospel sermon addresses this point as he quotes from David, himself:

*Therefore, being a prophet (David), and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ ... Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear ... Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (**Ac 2:30-36**).*

1. The point premillennialists cannot, or will not, grasp is that the throne of David/God is not on earth but in heaven. Jesus taught in a variety of ways that His kingdom was not of the earth (**Jn 18:36; Lk 17:20-21**), that His rule would not be visible and attended by earthly trappings.
2. Ironically, the premillennialist makes the same mistake as the Jew who he claims foiled God's plan for a kingdom.

## *Multiple Resurrections*

Premillennial doctrine holds to a number of different resurrections divided by hundreds of years. They cloud the issue by arbitrarily lumping multiple resurrections into one:

The order of events in the resurrection program would be:

- The resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the resurrection program (**1 Cor. 15:23**)
- The resurrection of the church age saints at the rapture (**1 Thess. 4:16**)
- The resurrection of the tribulation period saints (**Rev. 20:3-5**), together with the resurrection Old Testament saints (**Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19**) at the second advent of Christ to the earth
- The final resurrection of the unsaved dead (**Rev. 20:5, 11-14**) at the end of the millennial age.

The first four stages would all be included in the first resurrection ... and the last would be the second resurrection ... (Pentecost, in *Lion & Lamb*, p. 149).

This is a perfect example of the double-speak and bold assertions of premillennialists: Dwight Pentecost has four distinct resurrections separated by thousands of years yet they are merely “stages” of the “first resurrection.”

**Words mean things ... they don't merely mean what we want them to mean to satisfy our doctrinal speculations.** Jesus teaches only one resurrection for mankind wherein good and evil alike will be raised (**Jn 5:28-29**) and judged (**Mt 25:31-33**).

## **Conclusion**

The events surrounding the return of Jesus profoundly affect the way we live and the decisions we make. As we have seen, brethren in Thessalonica became idle and troublesome when they thought Jesus' return was imminent.

Paul warned the Corinthians of an “eat, drink and be merry” attitude which resulted from the idea that the resurrection had already occurred.

Jesus left the earth amid the echoes of a promised return, the annihilation of all creation, the return to life of all the dead and the great day of judgment. Those who accept these truths by faith and walk accordingly have great incentive to choose what is right.

On the other hand those who advocate a flawed God who leaves promises unfulfilled, who changes plans midstream, who is weak and subject to the whims of man are following a path of deceit. We cannot reject truth and follow myths and fables without consequence.

May this study better prepare us to live to the fullest each day, yet understand that the Lord may return at any moment to bring everything to its end. Let us walk by faith in the truths we have studied.

## Lesson 13: Additional Issues/ Review

### Did the NT Writers Expect Jesus to Return Soon

A. Some assert that NT writers mistakenly thought that Jesus would come back in the near future:

- **Jas 5:7-9** *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”*
- **1 Pet 4:7** *“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.”*
- **1 Pet 4:17** *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*

B. Considerations:

1. There seems to be two choices in interpreting these passages:

- The inspired writers believed Jesus’ return would happen but held out the possibility for all generations that it could occur in their respective lifetimes. Thus, there is a sense in which the nearness of the end is relative, OR ...
- The inspired writers mistakenly believed in the imminent return of Jesus.

2. Which of these honors the principle of inspiration?

- If God knew in the first century that Jesus was not coming back for at least two thousand years (as of now), would He allow Scripture to be written with that thrust?
- We must look harder in our studies to understand passages we hold to be contradictory (i.e., that assert Jesus’ return against the passages that say His return will be like a thief in the night).

C. Suggestion:

Such passages as above speak from a dispensational point of view; that is, from God’s point of view next thing to happen in regard to His direct intervention into the affairs of men is the second coming.

- **Heb 8:13** *“What is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”* This is the Hebrew writer’s comment on the writing of Jeremiah some 600 years before. “Ready” is from the Gk. *eggus*, and from Jeremiah’s point of view “ready” was still centuries away. Dispensationally, it was “near” because the die was cast; it was already declared by God. The next major phase of God’s plan was the new covenant which

would replace the law of Moses. It didn't matter how much time intervened (from man's standpoint). It was a done deal. (cf. same word in **Heb 6:8**).

- **Rom 13:11** *“For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.”* “Nearer” is also *eggus* and is used in a comparative sense (rather than near to occurring). Our salvation is relatively nearer today than it was yesterday (or fifty years ago) by possibility of the Lord's return or our own death. Paul continues: *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand (eggus).”* The day of final salvation is nearing without any reference to imminence or definite expectation.
- Similarly, **Acts 7:17** says, *“When the time of the promise drew near (“eggus”) which God had sworn to Abraham ...”*. Yet, the actual inheritance of the land was decades away. It was next in God's program of events, though not necessarily to any specific individual living at that time.

### The “AD 70 Theory”

A. Because of the difficulty of passages like those above (and others), a view has arisen over the past 30-40 years called the AD 70 theory. It is called this because its advocates believe that *all* prophecies of the end, judgment, resurrection, etc. were fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. As a sidelight, this theory also necessitates that all NT books were written before this date.

B. Some statements defining this theory:

1. “Jesus Himself also made several references to His second return in that first century generation. He once revealed that His disciples would not have gone over the cities of Israel, ‘till the Son of Man be come’ (Mt 10:23). Either Jesus came again as He had promised in John 14:1-3 or the disciples are still going over the cities of Israel and have long since embarrassed Methuselah!” (Charles Geiser, “Realized Eschatology: An Opinion,” quoted from *Florida College Annual Lectures, 1986*, p. 208). I would recommend this lecture book for an overview of this doctrine which has undermined the faith of some of our brethren.
2. Geiser, and the main proponent of this doctrine, Max King, cite passages such as **Mt 24; Mt 26:64; Jas 5:8; 1 Pet 4:7; 2 Pet 3:10-12; Heb 1:10-12; 12:2-27; 9:28; 10:37** and other passages as evidence that the “second coming” has already occurred in the form of Jerusalem's destruction.

C. Other features of this doctrine:

1. While the kingdom began on Pentecost, it did not fully come until it was taken away from the Jews in AD 70.
2. The period from AD 30-70 was a gradual transition period where the Law of Moses was gradually dying out and the gospel was gradually being established (patterned after the 40 years of wilderness wandering). Thus Judaism and Christianity co-existed during this period (as Ishmael and Isaac co-existed in the home of Abraham for a time).

3. The NT does not speak of the end of the material universe but only the end of the Jewish age.
4. The book of Revelation must have been dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem, not Rome, and thus (like all other NT books) must have been written before AD 70.
5. No bodily resurrection is forthcoming. When we die we are automatically raised and given a spiritual body. (Paul in **1 Corinthians 15** holds that to deny a physical resurrection is tantamount to denying the resurrection of Christ.)

### **Mt 24 – The Destruction of Jerusalem or the Second Coming or Both**

- A. Though impossible to review completely here, **Mt 24** (along with **Lk 17, 21**) has been a passage of difficulty for many centuries. In my view the best we can do (and ask from others) is to harmonize our view with other less difficult passages and not be dogmatic to the point of disrespect or disunity over them.
- B. Some view Jesus' entire answer in **Mt 24-25** to be in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem only. They would view the parables of the two servants, the wise and foolish virgins, the talents and the judgment scene to all refer to the end of the Jewish economy.
- C. Others see a near and distant prophecy in **Mt 24-25**, near being AD 70 and distant being the final judgment. The difficulty in this view is drawing a "dividing line" between the two (usually coming at **24:34** or **35**). Part of what complicates this issue is the different applications of the term "coming" and the apocalyptic language Jesus employs in **24:29-31**.